JUNE-JULY
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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Poggioli and the Refugees
by T. S. Stribling

The Treasure Hunt
by Ellery Queen

And So Died Riabouchinska
by Ray Bradbury

The Question Mark
by Octavus Roy Cohen

The Pickled Punks
by Fredric Brown

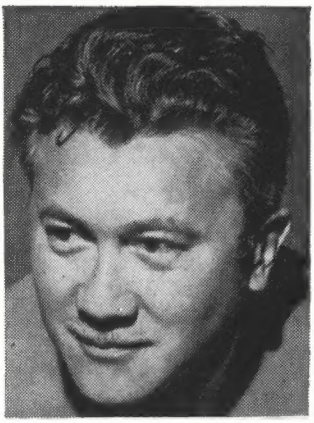
But the Patient Died
by Lawrence G. Blochman

THE ANGEL'S EYE

A NEW SAINT Story by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



As I look over the contents of our second issue, I find a slightly surprised satisfaction in learning that there are some solid compensations to this job of Supervising Editor which has been wished on me, compensations that make up at least in some more than small part for the chore of having to write introductions like this.

For one thing, to dispose of the most obvious angle right away, you can always sneak one of your own stories in among the assembled masterpieces. My contribution to this number is a piece called THE ANGEL'S EYE, an adventure of the Saint which takes place in Holland. All I will say about it is that I hope it does not get me in Dutch with anyone.

On a higher plane is the glow I feel at being able to introduce, for instance, a brand new story by Fredric Brown, a most versatile writer and an old favorite of mine. THE PICKLED PUNKS will be out later in book form —but you are privileged to read it first in this issue of my magazine. And when I see the title on some future best-seller list, I shall be able to say smugly, "Ah, yes, but *I* published it first."

Not a whit less is my satisfaction in having another first in this issue— AND SO DIED RIABOUCHINSKA by Ray Bradbury. Among his other accomplishments Mr. Bradbury has the distinction of being one of the first authors to lift the once-lowly science fiction story into the slick-paper magazines. Now he writes for such upper-case papers regularly. But who gets his latest story? We do!

I could go on down the bill of fare, mentioning such awesome names as Octavus Roy Cohen, Lawrence G. Blochman or T. S. Stribling, and pretend to be quite blasé about the whole thing.

All right, I'm not. I feel like a cat with a new clutch of kittens.

But that isn't all. I have a very personal gloat in this issue. For many years Ellery Queen (to use the name under which two good friends prefer to be jointly known) has frequently delved into my lurid past to reprint a Saint story in his own mystery magazine. Until now Ellery Queen had a magazine and I didn't. But now that I'm offering competition it is fun to come up with an Ellery Queen story—TREASURE HUNT.

All this and money too?

Leslie Charteris

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the angel's eye

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Simon Templar encounters a diamond whose size and brilliance might stir avarice in an angel—or even in a properly haloed saint.

THE HOLLANDIA IS ONE OF THE best hotels in Amsterdam. The best hotels everywhere exercise a proper discretion over the guests whom they admit to their distinguished accommodations. The clerk at the Hollandia read the name that Simon Templar had filled in on the form in front of him and his brow wrinkled as he looked up.

"Mr. Templar," he said. "Are you by any chance the Saint?"

Simon sighed imperceptibly. He knew that look. As a man who had rather a weakness for the best hotels it was sometimes a little tiresome to him.

"You guessed it," he said.

The clerk smiled with the utmost courtesy.

"I don't know if we have a room that would suit you."

"I'm not too hard to please."

"Excuse me," said the clerk.

He retired to an inner office. In a few minutes he came back, accompanied by an older and more authoritative personage.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Templar," said the personage cordially. "I am the manager. It is nice of you to come to us. But you do not have a reservation."

"No," said the Saint patiently. "But I wasn't expecting any trouble. I'm still not expecting any.

OUR SUPERVISING EDITOR'S ALTER EGO FINDS A NETHERLANDS ADVENTURE PROFITABLE IN ANOTHER NEW TALE OF THE SAINT

Not any at all. I'm on vacation."

"Of course."

"As a matter of fact I only came this way to say hullo to an old friend of mine, one of your eminent citizens. You probably know him—Pieter Liefman. He makes some of the best beer in these parts. But he's out of town and won't be back till tomorrow or the next day. I just want to wait over and see him."

"You are a friend of Mr. Liefman?"

"We are what you might call brothers under the suds."

The manager studied him frankly for a while and found it hard to see anything that threatened the peace and good name of the hotel. The Saint wore his clothes with the careless ease of a man accustomed to the best of everything—and with the confidence of one who did not have to think twice about paying for it.

At that moment the keen corsair's face was in repose, and the imps of devilment were stilled in the clear blue eyes. This was a trick of camouflage that sometimes served the Saint better than a disguise and on those occasions almost made him seem to fit his incongruous nickname.

"I think we can find you a room," said the manager.

So that minor problem was overcome but not without starting a slight stir of curiosity that spread like an active virus through all levels of the human beings within the hotel, who were, after all, only human. Simon knew it when he came downstairs again, after a shower and a change, by the studiously veiled interest of the staff, the elaborately impersonal glances and politely inaudible whisperings of the other guests in the lobby.

The years had given him an extrasensory perception of the subtle symptoms of recognition—but in the same time he had developed a protective tolerance for it. Let the speculations buzz—they could not embarrass him when he had nothing to hide.

For what he had told the manager was the simple truth. He had made the detour to Amsterdam in the course of an already aimless European vacation for no reason but the impulse to renew an old acquaintance and sample the products of the famous Liefman *brouwerei* at the source.

He had no thought of avenging any iniquities, robbing any robbers or doing any of the other entertaining and lawless things which had made his name a nightmare to the police of four continents and given him the reputation which caused even tourists to stare furtively from behind their guidebooks.

That this peaceful project was to be short-lived was not his fault—he himself would have added, with a perfectly straight face, "as usual."

He dined at the Lido, on a *rijstafel* of heroic conception—the taste for and the art of preparing a true Indonesian curry being one of the few legacies left to the Netherlands from their former East Indian em-

pire. It was not until his appetite was on the verge of admitting defeat that he had time to become aware that he was the object of more than ordinary attention from a table across the room.

There were two people at it, a middle-aged couple whose accents, as he had unconsciously overheard them speaking to the waiter, identified them as English, and whose clothes had a dull neatness that was worn like a proud insigne of respectability. The man had a square shape, with thinning hair, rimless spectacles and a face molded in the lines of stolid responsibility.

The woman was plump and motherly and looked as if she would be equally at home in a kitchen or a church bazaar. He looked most obviously like a senior employee of a prosperous business house, who had worked his way up from the bottom during a lifetime of loyal service, and his competent and comfortable wife.

The only untypical thing about them was that instead of eating in the bored or companionable silence normally practiced by such couples, they had been talking busily throughout the meal in low voices of which not a sound had reached the Saint's sensitive ears—except, as has been said, when they spoke to the waiter.

Simon Templar, whose favorite study was the mechanism of his fellow creatures, had begun to theorize as to what gave them so much material for conversation as approaching satiety released his interest from food. It was not, he concluded, a matter of such connubial recriminations as might typically have disrupted a typical taciturnity.

Yet the conversation did not seem to be made up of pleasant trivialities. For the man's air of permanent anxiety deepened as it went on and once or twice he ran a hand over his sparse hair in a gesture almost of desperation.

It was about the same time that Simon realised from the frequent glances in his direction that he was somehow being made a major factor in the discussion.

He gazed out of the window at the twinkling lights reflected in the ornamental lakes of the Vondel Park and hoped that his impression was mistaken or that they would soon find something else to argue about.

A voice at his elbow said, "Excuse me, Mr. Templar—you *are* the Saint, aren't you?"

Simon turned resignedly. It was the woman, of course.

"I suppose somebody told you at the Hollandia," he said. "But they should have told you not to worry. I've promised not to murder anyone or steal their jewels while I'm here."

"My name's Upwater," she said. "And I did want to talk to you about jewels—but not about your stealing them. I've heard that you're really a good man, that you help people in trouble, and we're in terrible trouble. I told my husband it seemed like Providence, your being

here, just when this awful thing has happened.

"I said, 'The Saint's the only person who might be able to help us,' and he said, 'Why should you bother,' and we had quite an argument but I had to speak to you anyway. At least you'll listen, won't you? May I call him over?"

She had already dumped herself in a vacant chair and the Saint did not see any way short of outright churlishness to dislodge her. In the mellow aftermath of a good meal such violent measures were unthinkable. And he had nothing else in particular to do. That was so often what got him into things . . .

Simon grinned philosophically and nodded.

"What's the matter with these jewels?" he inquired.

She turned and beckoned her husband, who started to get up from their table, looking more worried than ever.

"As a matter of fact," she said, "it's actually only one jewel—a diamond."

"Oh."

"We've lost it—and it doesn't belong to us."

"That could be downright embarrassing," Simon admitted. "But why should I know where to look for it?"

"It's been stolen."

"Not by me."

"This is a perfect blue stone," said Mr. Upwater, sitting down heavily, "as big as the Hope diamond. It's worth half a million dollars in your American money.

II

"I work for a very exclusive firm of jewelers in Bond Street, in London," Mr. Upwater explained in a ponderous and painstaking way. "I've been with them myself for thirty years. The stone belongs to one of our clients. It is a magnificent gem with a rather romantic name—the Angel's Eye. But being an old stone it isn't too well cut.

"Our client decided to have it recut, which would improve its appearance and even enhance its value. As the oldest employee of the firm, it was entrusted to me to bring here, to one of the best cutters in Amsterdam, to have the work done."

"And somebody swiped it from you on the way?" Simon hazarded.

"Oh, no. I delivered it to the cutter, Hendrik Jonkheer, yesterday. Today I went back to watch the start of the cutting. Mrs. Upwater went with me. I'd brought her along, for a little holiday. And —tell Mr. Templar, Mabel."

"Mr. Jonkheer looked Mr. Upwater straight in the eye," said Mrs. Upwater, "and told him he'd never seen him before and he certainly hadn't brought him any diamond."

Something like a phantom feather trailed up the Saint's spine, riffling his skin with ghostly goose-pimples. And on the heels of that psychic chill came a warm pervasive glow of utter beatitude that crowned his recent feast more perfectly than the coffee and Napoleon brandy, which he had not yet touched, would ever

do. His interest was no longer polite or even perfunctory. It had the vast receptive serenity of a cathedral.

For just as a musician would be electrified by a cadence of divine harmonies, so could the Saint respond to the tones of new and fabulous adventure. And about this one, he knew, there could be nothing commonplace. Suddenly he was humbly grateful for his ambiguous reputation, for the little difficulty at the hotel, for the resultant gossip, for the extravagant bonus which it had brought him.

Because in a few simple unmistakable words the prosaic Mr. and Mrs. Upwater had placed in his hands the string to a kite of such superlatively crooked design that its flight, wherever it led, could bring only joy to his perversely artistic soul—a swindle of such originality and impudence that he contemplated it with an emotion bordering upon awe.

"That," said the Saint at length, with transcendent understatement after so long a pause, "is a lulu."

"I can't get used to it yet," Mr. Upwater said dazedly. "He stood there, Mr. Jonkheer did, looking straight at me just like I'm looking at you, only as if he thought I was a lunatic, and said he'd never set eyes on me before in his life. He almost had me believing I'd gone out of my mind. Only I knew I hadn't."

"It's just like that story," Mrs. Upwater said. "You must know the one. About the girl and her mother who go to a hotel in Paris, and the mother's sick, so the daughter goes out to get her some medicine, and when she gets back everybody in the hotel says they've never seen her before, or her mother, and when she goes to the room where she left her mother it's a different room, and there's nobody there."

Simon nodded, almost in a trance himself.

"I know the story," he said. "It turns out that the mother had the plague, or something, doesn't it? And they got rid of her and tried to cover it up because they didn't want to scare away the tourists. But this is a new twist!"

"That it is," said Mr. Upwater gloomily. "Only diamonds don't get any disease. But they're worth a lot of money."

At last the Saint was able to control the palpitating gremlins inside him enough to reach for a cigarette.

"You're sure you went to the right place?" he asked.

"I couldn't go wrong. The name's on the door."

"And you're sure it was Jonkheer you saw?"

"Of course I'm sure. It was the same man both times. The police knew him too."

"You've been to the police already?"

"Of course I have. First thing I did, when I saw I wasn't getting anywhere with Jonkheer. They went with me to the shop. But it was his word against mine and they preferred his. Said he was a well-

known respectable citizen, but they didn't know the same about me. I almost got locked up myself. They as good as said I was either off my nut or trying to blackmail him."

"Didn't anyone else see you give him the stone?"

"No—it was just him and me. I didn't take Mrs. Upwater with me yesterday—she wanted to stay at the hotel and do our unpacking."

"But if you say you gave it to him, Tom," said Mrs. Upwater loyally, "I know you did."

Simon picked up his balloon glass and rolled the golden liquid around in it.

"Didn't you get a receipt or anything?"

"Indeed I did. But this Dutchman swears it isn't even in his writing."

"Could someone else have disguised himself as Jonkheer?"

"If you saw him, Mr. Templar, you'd know that couldn't be done except in a story."

"How about a black-sheep twin brother?"

"I thought of that, too," Mr. Upwater said dourly. "I'm not a fool, and I've read books. He just doesn't have one. The police vouch for that."

The Saint sipped his cognac reverently. Everything was getting better and better.

"And you would have vouched for Jonkheer."

"I never met him before," Mr. Upwater said carefully, "but I've known about him for years. Everyone knows him in the trade."

"So you've no idea what would turn a man like that into a thief."

Mr. Upwater moved his hands hopelessly. "Who knows what makes anyone go wrong? They say that every man has his price, so I suppose every man can be tempted. And that stone was big enough to tempt anyone."

"Then," said the Saint, "the same could be said about you."

"That's what he's afraid of," Mrs. Upwater said gently.

Simon sniffed his brandy again, watching the man.

"What does your firm think about it?"

"I haven't told them yet," Upwater said dully. "I haven't had the courage. You see—"

"You see," Mrs. Upwater put in and her voice began to break, "they know Mr. Jonkheer too. They've done business with him for a long time. My husband's been with them for a long time too but he's only an employee. *Someone's* got to be guilty. They can't *prove* that Tom's lying because he isn't—but that's not enough. If he can't prove absolutely that he's telling the truth—"

"There'd always be a doubt," her husband finished for her. "And with a firm like I work for, in that kind of business, that's the end. They'd let me out and I'd never get another job. I might as well put my head in a gas oven, or jump in one of these canals."

He pulled off his spectacles abruptly and put a trembling hand over his eyes.

Mrs. Upwater patted his shoulder as if he had been a little boy.

"There, there," she said meaninglessly and looked at the Saint with tears brimming in her eyes. "Mr. Templar, you're the only man in the world who might be able to do something about a thing like this. You *must* help us!"

She really didn't have to plead. For Simon Templar to have walked away from a story like that would have been as improbable a phenomenon as a terrier ignoring the presence of a rat waltzing under his nose. There were people who thought that the Saint was a cold-blooded nemesis of crime—but altogether aside from the irresistible abstract beauty of the situation that the Upwaters had set before him he felt genuinely sorry for them.

His human sympathy, however, detracted nothing from the delight with which he viewed the immediate future. It was true that only a few hours ago he had promised to be good—but there were limits. His evening, and in fact his whole visit to Amsterdam, was made.

He signaled to a waiter.

"I think we should all have a drink on this," he said.

The half-incredulous joy in Mrs. Upwater's tear-dimmed eyes, to anyone else, would have been enough reward.

"You will help us?" she said breathlessly.

"There's nothing I can do tonight. So we might as well just celebrate. But tomorrow," Simon promised, "I will pay a call on your Mr. Jonkheer."

III

The name was on the door, as Mr. Upwater had said, of a narrow-fronted three-storied brick building in a narrow street of similar buildings behind the Rijksmuseum. HENDRIK JONKHEER, and in smaller letters under it, *Diamantslijter.* From the weathered stone of the doorstep to the weathered tile of the peaked roof the house had a solid air of permanence and tradition.

The only feature that distinguished it from its equally solid neighbors was the prison-like arrangement of iron bars over the two muslin-curtained ground floor windows. Definitely it bore no stigma of a potentially flashy or fly-by-night operation.

Simon tugged at the old fashioned bell-pull and heard it clang somewhere in the depths of the building. Presently the door opened, no more than a foot, to the limit of a chain fastened inside and a thin young man in a knee-length gray overall coat looked out.

"May I see Mr. Jonkheer?" Simon said.

"Your business, sir?"

"I'm a magazine writer, doing an article on the diamond business. I thought a man of Mr. Jonkheer's standing could give me some valuable information."

The young man unfastened the chain and let him in to a bare narrow hall. There were doors on one side and another at the back, and a flight of uncarpeted wooden stairs led upwards. On a hard chair beside the stairs, with a newspaper on his lap and one hand under the paper, sat a burly man with blond close-cropped hair who stared at the Saint woodenly.

"One moment, please," said the young man.

He disappeared through the door at the end of the hall. The burly man continued to stare motionlessly at the Saint as if he were stuffed. In a little while the young man came back.

"This way, please."

The back room was a homely sort of office, the only possible sanctum of an individualistic old-world craftsman who needed no front for his skill. It contained an ancient roll-top desk with dusty papers overflowing its pigeonholes and littered over its surfaces, a battered swivel chair at the desk and two overstuffed armchairs whose leather upholstery was dark and shiny with age.

There were china figures and family photographs in gilt frames on the marble mantelpiece over a black iron coal fireplace. The safe stood under another barred window —and massive though it was, it would not have offered much more resistance than a matchbox to a modern cracksman.

Mr. Jonkheer was a short bald man in his shirtsleeves with a wide paunch under a leather apron and a wide multiple-chinned face. It was obvious at a glance that no make-up virtuoso could have duplicated him. His pale blue eyes looked small and bright behind thick gold-rimmed glasses.

"You are a writer, eh?" he said, with a kind of gruff affability. "Which magazine do you write for?"

"Any one that'll buy what I write."

"So. And what can I tell you for your article?"

The Saint sat in one of the heavy armchairs and opened a pack of cigarettes.

"Well, anything interesting about your work," he said.

"I cut jewels—principally diamonds."

"I know. I'm told you're one of the best cutters in the business."

"There are many good ones. I am good."

"I suppose you've been doing it all your life?"

"Since I am an apprentice at sixteen. I have been cutting stones now for forty years."

"You must have cut some famous jewels in that time."

A twin pair of vertical lines began to pucker between the cutter's bushy brows.

"Famous?"

"I mean, well-known jewels that people would like to read about."

"I have cut many good stones."

This was manifestly going to

make no revolutionary progress. Simon said as offhandedly as he could, "You're too modest, Mr. Jonkheer. For instance, how about the Angel's Eye?"

There was no audible sound effect like a sickening thud but the response was much the same. In a silence that fairly hummed with hollowness the diamond cutter's small bright eyes hardened and froze like drops of his own gems.

The Saint exhaled cigarette smoke and tried to appear as if he noticed nothing out of the ordinary.

At last Jonkheer said, "What about the Angel's Eye?"

"You know the stone I mean?"

"Of course. It is a famous diamond."

"How are you going to recut it?"

"I am not recutting it."

Jonkheer's tone was still gruff but no longer affable. Simon looked puzzled.

"But you have it here."

"I do not."

"I was told . . ."

"You are mistaken."

"I don't get it," said the Saint with an ingenuous frown. "The fellow who referred me to you said positively that the Angel's Eye was brought to you for recutting only the other day. I don't mean to pry into your business, but . . ."

The other's steady stare was cold with suspicion. "Who was this person?"

"It was somebody in the trade. I don't know that I ought to mention his name. But he was very definite."

Jonkheer gazed at him for a longer time, with no increase in friendliness. Then he turned his head sliightly and called, "*Zuilen, kom toch binnen!*"

The burly blond man who had been sitting out in the hall walked in instantly and without any preliminary sound. Simon realised that the door of the little office had never been fully closed and the big man must have been standing directly outside it.

He brought his newspaper with him, carrying it rather awkwardly, as if he had something underneath it. With his left hand he took a small leather folder from his pocket and showed Simon the card in it. The card carried his photograph and an inscription which Simon did not have time to read but he recognized the official-looking seal and the word *Polite.*

The big man, whose name was evidently Zuilen, was a very polite *politie.* "May I see your credentials, please?"

"My passport is at the hotel," said the Saint.

"Something, perhaps, from the magazine you write for?"

"I don't write for any particular magazine. I just peddle my stuff wherever I can."

"You must have something on you, some evidence of identity," said the blond man patiently. "Please."

He did not openly suggest that if none were produced, the matter could be continued at headquarters.

That would have been superfluous.

Simon produced his wallet and watched interestedly while Zuilen glanced at the contents. The detective's eyes snapped from the first card that caught them to the Saint's face as if a switch had been flicked but his manner remained painstakingly correct.

"Mr. Templar," he said, "I did not hear that you were a writer."

"It's a new racket," said the Saint easily.

The blond man handed the wallet back. "You would do well to search for your material somewhere else," he said. "There is nothing to interest you here."

"Now wait a minute," Simon argued. "I'm not making any trouble. I was told on the best authority that Mr. Jonkheer had received a diamond called the Angel's Eye to recut. I simply asked him about it. That's isn't a crime."

"I am glad there is no crime," said the burly man stolidly. "We do not like to have crime from foreigners, especially during the tourist season. Mr. Jonkheer does not have any such diamond. Also he does not wish to be bothered. It is better that you do not make any trouble." He held the door firmly open. "Good-day, Mr. Templar."

A few moments later, without a harsh word having been spoken or an overt threat having been uttered, the Saint found himself indisputably out on the sidewalk, blinking at the noonday sunshine and listening to the rattle of chain and bolts being refastened on the inside of the old oak door.

IV

"It was a lovely job," Simon told the Upwaters. "I never had a chance of getting to first base."

They sat around a lunch table in one of the crypt-like rooms of the Vijf Vliegen, that quaintly labyrinthine restaurant on the Spuistraat where they had arranged to meet—although only the Saint seemed to have much appetite for the excellent *kalfoesters*, thin fillets of veal browned in butter and lemon juice, with stewed cucumbers and brown beans, which he had ordered for what he considered fairly earned nutriment.

"That policeman, too," said Mrs. Upwater indignantly. "That Jonkheer really must have pulled the wool over their eyes."

"Or else they're all in the swindle up to the neck with him," Mr. Upwater said bitterly.

"However it goes," said the Saint, "the place is pretty well guarded. I haven't the faintest doubt that the Angel's Eye is there. They were so grimly determined to deny it. I could see it gave Jonkheer a good jolt when I asked about it. I bet they're still worrying about what my angle is, if that's any help to you."

"It's there, all right," Upwater said gloomily. "Did you see his safe?"

"Oh, yes—in his office."

"I didn't see it. I was taken right

into his workshop the first time—and the second time I didn't get any further than the hall. If I'd seen the safe I might have been able to have the policeman make him open it."

"His office is on the ground floor at the back of the hall."

"The diamond probably isn't there now anyway," said Mrs. Upwater.

Simon took a deep pull at his beer.

"How big is this diamond?" he asked. "You said it was as big as the Hope. How big is that?"

"About a hundred carats," Upwater said. He put the tips of a thumb and forefinger together, forming a circle. "About so big. It'd be easy to hide anywhere."

Simon forked together the last remnants of food on his plate and ate them with infinite enjoyment. Any lingering doubts that he might have had were gone. He knew this was going to be an adventure to remember.

"I'm certain the Angel's Eye is at Jonkheer's," he said. "That's why the cop is staying on the premises. But I don't think it's hidden. I think they figure it's well enough guarded. And an old fashioned conservative type like Jonkheer would have complete confidence in an old fashioned safe like that, just because it weighs a few tons and he's had it ever since he went into business. He wouldn't believe that any up-to-date expert could go through it like a coffee-can."

The man and woman gazed at him uncertainly.

"What good does that do us?" Mr. Upwater asked at length. "I'm no safe-cracker."

"But I am," said the Saint.

There was another long and pent-up silence.

"You'd *burgle* it?" Mrs. Upwater said.

"I think you knew all along," said the Saint gently, "that I would."

Mrs. Upwater began to cry.

"You can't do that," Mr. Upwater protested. "That's robbery!"

"To take back your own property?"

"But if you got caught . . ."

"If I only take the Angel's Eye, which Jonkheer isn't supposed to have anyway, how is he going to phrase his squawk?"

Mr. Upwater clutched his wife's hand, staring at the Saint with a pathetic sort of devotion.

"I never thought I'd find myself siding with anyone about breaking the law," he said. "But you're right, Mr. Templar. Jonkheer's got us by the short hairs and the only way we can ever get even is to steal the diamond back, just the same way that he got it. Only I'd never have thought of it myself and it beats me why you'd take a chance like that to help a total stranger."

Simon lighted a cigarette.

"Well," he said, and his smile was happily mephistophelian, "suppose I did just happen to take something else besides your diamond—by way

of interest, you might say—would you feel it was your duty to tell the police about me?"

"*I* wouldn't," said Mrs. Upwater promptly, dabbing her eyes. "A man like Jonkheer deserves to lose everything he's got."

"Then that's settled," said the Saint cheerfully. "How about some dessert? Some *oliebollen?* Or the *flensjes* should be mildly sensational."

Mr. Upwater shook his head. He was still staring at the Saint much as a lost explorer in the Sahara would have stared at the approach of an ice wagon.

"I'm too nervous to eat," he said. "I'll be in a sweat until this is over. When will you do it?"

"On the stroke of midnight," said the Saint. "I'm superstitious about the witching hour—it's always been lucky for me. Besides, by that time our friend Jonkheer will be sound asleep and even the police guard will be drowsy. I'm pretty sure Jonkheer lives over the shop and he's the type who would go to bed about ten."

"Isn't there anything I can do, Mr. Templar? I wouldn't be much of a hand at what you're planning but—"

"Not a thing. Take Mrs. Upwater sightseeing. Have dinner—go to your room, break out some cards and send for a bottle of schnapps. When the waiter brings it make like I've gone to the bathroom. If anything goes wrong you'll be my alibi—we were all playing cards. I'll see you seen after midnight with your diamond." Simon looked at his watch. "Now, if you're through, I'll run along. I've got to shop for a few things I don't normally carry in my luggage."

He spent an interesting afternoon in his own way and got back to the Hollandia about six o'clock with no particular plans for the early part of the evening. But that state of tranquil vagueness lasted only until he turned away from the desk with his key. Then a hand smacked him violently between the shoulder-blades and he turned again to meet the merry dark horn-spectacled eyes of a slight young man who looked more like a New Yorker than any New Yorker could have looked.

"Simon, you old son-of-a-gun!" cried Pieter Liefman. "What shemozzle are you up to here?"

The scion of Amsterdam's most traditionalistic brewery had spent some years in the United States and prided himself on his complete assimilation of the culture of the New World.

"Pete!" The Saint grinned. "You couldn't have shown up at a better moment."

"I've been out in the sticks," Liefman said. "I just got back in town and got your message and I came right over to try and track you down. What's boiling?"

"Let's get a drink somewhere and I'll tell you."

"My hot-shot's outside. We can drive out to Scherpenzeel, to the De Witte."

"Good enough. The way you drive you can get me back in plenty oftime for what I want to do later."

As Pieter Liefman needled his Jaguar through the sparse evening traffic with an ebullient disregard for all speed laws and principles of safety that would have had most passengers gripping the seat and muttering despondent prayers, Simon Templar leaned back with a cigarette and reflected gratefully on his good fortune. Pieter's timely arrival had made his project even neater than he had hoped.

"I guess you rate pretty high in this town, Pete," he remarked.

"If you mean I should get a ducat for speeding you don't know the quarter of it. They throw the book at me about once a week."

"But in anv serious case I imagine you'd be as influential a witness as any guy could want."

"Quit holding up on me," Liefman implored. "Is the Saint on the war-paint again?"

Simon began his tale at the beginning . . .

V

The return from Scherpenzeel, after a gargantuan repast devoured with respectful deliberation, was made at the same suicidal velocity. But so coolly timed was it that clocks were booming the hour Simon had fixed in his mind as the Jaguar purred to a stop in the street where Hendrik Jonkheer plied his trade, several doors away from the house itself. The short street was deserted except for one other car parked at the opposite end.

"I only hope you've figured this on the button," Pieter Liefman said.

"I am the world's greatest practical psychologist," said the Saint. "Go ahead with your part of the act."

He slipped out of the car and strolled unhurriedly down the street to Jonkheer's door. The building was dark and wrapped in silence. He turned the door handle experimentally. The door started to yawn at his touch and no inside chain stopped it.

Simon stepped in, closing it swiftly and silently behind him. With a pencil flashlight smothered in his hand so that the bulb was almost covered by his fingers, he let a dim glow play momentarily over the inside of the frame. The chain was dangling, the hasp at one end still attached to it and fragments of freshly torn wood adhering to the screws, testifying to the inherent weakness of such devices which was no surprise to him.

He turned the same almost phosphorescent illumination around the hall and at the foot of the stairs he saw the burly blond guard, Zuilen, lying on the floor, his wrists and ankles expertly bound and tied together and his mouth covered with adhesive tape. The big policeman seemed uninjured, save perhaps in his dignity to judge by the lively glare of wrath that smouldered in his eyes.

Simon went past him without

pausing for any social amenities, moving with the fluid soundlessness of a disembodied shadow. The door of the back office was ajar, outlined with the faint luminosity of a well-shaded light within. Simon pushed it with his fingertips and it swung wider without even an uncooperative creak.

Inside, he saw that the light came from a small professionally shrouded electric lantern on the floor beside the massive safe. The safe was open and the means of its opening were evident in an assortment of shining tools, spread on a velvet cloth in front of it.

Between Simon and the safe stood a man with a large handkerchief knotted loosely around his throat, obviously serving as an easily replaceable mask. He was in the act of stuffing a handful of small tissue-paper packages into his pocket.

"Good evening," said the Saint because it seemed as tactful a way of drawing attention to himself as he could think of.

He said it very quietly too, in case his audience had a weak heart—but just the same the man spun around like a puppet jerked with a string.

The movement stopped there because Simon was playing the beam of his flashlight pointedly on the gun in his right hand to discourage any additional reaction. But there was enough general luminance, between that and the shielded lamp on the floor, for each of them to see the other's face.

Mr. Upwater stared at him pallidly, and licked his lips.

"You weren't supposed to be here for an hour," he said stupidly.

"That's what I told you," said the Saint calmly, "so that I'd know about what time you'd be here. Naturally you wanted to have comfortable time to do the job before I arrived but you wouldn't want to be too long before, in case it was discovered too soon for me to walk in and take the rap.

"You did the groundwork very cleverly—getting me to come here this morning and case the joint for you, at the same time establishing myself as a prime suspect. The only thing I was a little worried about was whether you meant to really let me do the job myself and hijack the boodle afterwards.

"But I decided you wouldn't take that big a chance—you couldn't be quite sure that with so much loot in my pockets I mightn't yield to temptation and double-cross you. When you said yourself that every man has his price you gave me a fix on your thinking."

Mr. Upwater's eyes were wild. "You've got it all wrong," he said feverishly. "I was afraid you were just kidding me—that you wouldn't really do it at all—so I made up my mind to do it myself."

"And not like any amateur, either," said the Saint approvingly. "Those tools of yours are first class. I suppose you wouldn't like to tell me how you got wind of the Angel's

Eye being recut here? They were certainly doing their best to keep it quiet, to try and avoid having any trouble with people like us. I could tell that by the reception I got when I started to ask questions. It was nice work on your part to locate it —but you must have thought you were really in luck when you heard I was in town, all ready to be the fall guy."

"So help me, Mr. Templar, I told you the truth."

"Oh no, you didn't—not from the word Go. I knew you were lying from the moment you said you delivered the Angel's Eye the day before yesterday and the cutting was supposed to start yesterday. Anyone who knows anything about diamonds knows that a cutter studies an important stone like that for weeks, maybe even months, before he makes the first cut—because if he makes any mistake about the grain he might break it into a lot of worthless fragments.

"I was doubly sure that you didn't work for any big-time jewelers when you said that the Angel's Eye was as big as the Hope diamond and weighed about a hundred carats. For your information the Hope diamond, good as it is, weighs only forty-four and a quarter. It's my business to know things like that and it ought to be yours."

Upwater swallowed.

"Can't we call it quits?" he said desperately. "There's plenty for both of us."

"Thank you," said the Saint, "but this time I'll be happy to collect a legitimate reward with no headaches."

"Nobody'll believe you," Upwater said viciously. "I'll say you were in it with me right up to now."

"I'm sorry," said the Saint, "but I've taken care to prove otherwise."

There was a sudden rush of feet and the lights went on. Two uniformed men stood in the doorway, with Pieter Liefman crowding in past them. Pieter put an arm around the Saint's shoulders and spoke rapidly to the policemen in Dutch. Upwater wilted as he realized that the trap was closed.

Some time later, as they all went out into the street, with Upwater handcuffed between the two officers, Simon looked for the car that had been parked on the far corner. It was no longer there.

Pieter intercepted the glance. "It took off when I came back with the flatfeet," he said.

Simon read the mute entreaty in Upwater's white face and shrugged. "Okay," he said. "We won't say anything about Mabel. After all, she was the one who really brought me into this."

On second thought, after he saw Mr. Upwater's next expression, he wondered if that were quite the right thing to mention.

Poggioli and the refugees

by . . . T. S. Stribling

There seemed no doubt Pompalone had poisoned the Curacao boniface—until the cruising Ohio professor put things into reverse.

Herr Karel Heinsius, police inspector of Curacao, Dutch West Indies, sat glancing first at the passenger list of the incoming Dutch steamer *Vollendam* and then through his window at the storm signal flying from the customhouse staff. And the inspector saw a sardonic fitness in the fact that the barometer should fall on precisely the forenoon when the noted—perhaps notorious—Cesar Pompalone, deposed dictator of Venezuela, landed in the harbor of Willemstad.

Half an hour after the "Magnificent" Pompalone came ashore, one of Heinsius's men telephoned that the ex-dictator had lodged in the Hotel Saragossa in Otrabanda. Heinsius instructed his informant to remain at the hotel until the refugee president shipped north.

Inspector Heinsius hoped but did not expect that this incident would end his relations with the Magnificent Pompalone. It was the inspector's duty to see that the ex-dictator did ship north. Deposed presidents flying out of Venezuela are a fairly ordinary phenomenon in the West Indies.

Just about everybody has heard of T. S. Stribling, author of the Pulitzer Prizewinning THE STORE and other eminent novels, as well as numerous justly famed dramas and satires. Few, however, know that in Poggioli, Professor of Psychology at Ohio State, Mr. Stribling has created perhaps the most astute and human of American sleuths, a modest bumbling everyday fellow long favored and savored by the cognoscenti of crime. Which makes his creator just about the only mystery writer ever to win a Pulitzer Prize.

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There is an informal international agreement among the powers that own these islands that once a dictator leaves Venezuela he must not be allowed to return. All the rest of the world is open to the fugitive's business or pleasure but not Venezuela.

The reason for this harsh mandate is simple. The powers owning West Indian islands also possess large commercial interests in Venezuela. The flight of a dictator means the end of a revolution and more stable business conditions—but the return of an ex-dictator marks the beginning of a new revolt and a new series of financial disturbances. Therefore, by this informal agreement, the road of dictators out of Venezuela is devoted exclusively to one-way traffic.

Not until the following day did the Magnificent Pompalone obtrude himself again on Herr Heinsius's attention. The inspector was eating breakfast, which occurs in Curacao from twelve to one o'clock, when the telephone called the inspector to come at once to the Hotel Saragossa in Otrabanda.

Heinsius immediately imagined a clash between his agent and the Venezuelan. He hurried into his car and then down the white street between the gayly painted Dutch houses of Willemstad. As he drove he pondered what he would do with the Magnificent Pompalone—put him in the *cuartel* there in Willemstad, ship him north, willy-nilly, to New York, where the Americans would keep him safely away from Venezuela, transport him to London?

A few minutes later the inspector was driving across the long pontoon bridge that connects Otrabanda on one side of the sea canal to Willemstad on the other. At a pier a hundred yards away lay the *Vollendam*, disgorging her hold of Dutch products to be reshipped to South and Central American ports. On the rising wind came the smell of shipping and the tang of the sea.

The Hotel Saragossa in Otrabanda is a large hostelry, brightly painted in reds and greens. This building, and indeed the whole Dutch city, gives the impression of having been constructed out of big gay toy blocks for overgrown children.

Around the entrance of the hotel was a rabble of dirty Negroes who had been attracted to the place by that desire for the exciting and the uncanny which the West Indian Negro possesses to a degree.

As the car drove up to the hotel, Dr. van Maasdyk, appeared on the piazza and made a gesture of relief at seeing the inspector. Heinsius jumped out and ran up the steps, speculating what trouble his man had had with the Venezuelan.

"Has anything happened to Barneveldt?" he asked the physician quickly.

"Not to Barneveldt, but to Señor Grillet, the proprietor."

Heinsius was surprised. "What's the matter with Grillet?"

"He is dead," said Van Maasdyk, with excited brevity. "Has been dead for an hour at least. We found him a few minutes ago."

"There was no fight, no disturbance?" asked the inspector.

"Nothing of the sort. He was found in his study. I gave the body a cursory examination and was about to pronounce it heart failure but . . ." He hesitated.

"But what, *Herr* Doctor?"

"Well, there was a peculiar twist to our old friend's death—but you will see. We left the body sitting at the table exactly as we found it."

The two men were now entering the lobby of the Hotel Saragossa, where a number of guests of half a dozen nationalities were assembled. The doctor and the officer were too close to the group to continue their remarks.

Barneveldt, the inspector's man, had corraled the entire hotel in the lobby, and the guests were discussing the proprietor's sudden death. An American was saying in an aggrieved tone, "It's a shame we can't go in and look at the body. I paid my three bucks a day here and they told me it included everything."

From the upper story came the sound of a woman's weeping. Somebody in the crowd whispered, "There's the inspector now."

A glance over the lobby showed Heinsius the squarely built form and aggressive olive face of the man he knew instantly to be the Magnificent Pompalone.

Renewed suspicion, entirely unfounded now, floated through the inspector's head, that if any foul play had been dealt to Señor Grillet somehow this Venezuelan was at the bottom of it.

The next moment he said, first in English, then in Spanish, "Gentlemen, *señores*, may I request that none of you leave the hotel until I finish my investigations? Her Majesty's government will appreciate this courtesy."

He bowed to the lobby in general. The American grumbled *sotto voce*, "Courtesy! If we try to go out we'll get pinched!"

On the second floor the inspector and the doctor were met by Hortensia Grillet, daughter of the deceased man, a tall, olive-tinted girl who showed clearly her Latin extraction, although she wore the usual apron and cap of the Dutch. As a last Dutch touch the girl had a dustrag in her hand.

"Which room, Hortensia?" asked Van Maasdyk.

Hortensia, still sobbing, pointed to a door, then turned away in a renewed burst of grief. The physician murmured some word of consolation to the girl and the two men entered the study.

The proprietor of the Saragossa Hotel might have been asleep in his study with his head leaning over on his arms on his greenheart table, save that he sat too still. Around the walls of the room ranged bookcases of the same cool-colored hardwood. On the floor were rare

Peruvian llama-wool blankets used as rugs.

The inspector stood looking about the library from the doorway. "You mentioned something unusual, *Herr* Doctor?"

Dr. van Maasdyk moved silently across the Peruvian rugs and touched a yellowed photograph which lay by the hand of the dead man. "It's this—I'd like you to look at it."

Herr Heinsius regarded it attentively. It was the picture of a young and extremely pretty Latin-American woman and the photographer's signature bore a Caracas address. Written in faded letters was the legend, *Ana Sixto y Carrera, 1902.*

A resemblance between the woman in the picture and the girl he had seen weeping in the hall caused the inspector to remark, "That must have been Grillet's wife, Hortensia's mother."

"Undoubtedly," agreed the doctor. "Now, look here! This is why I telephoned you."

He turned the picture over and showed on its back in the same faded letters, *Account of 12 de agosto, 1906.* Immediately beneath this in fresh blue ink was the entry, *Account settled 5 de enero, 1925.*

Beside the photograph, where it had dropped from Señor Grillet's fingers, lay a fountain pen.

"If it hadn't been for that," explained the doctor, "I should have attributed his death to heart failure without hesitation."

Heinsius nodded. "There is nothing about the appearance of the body that suggests an unnatural death?"

"Nothing at all. His end evidently came as peacefully as sleep. But the photograph suggests he realised his end had come."

"Nineteen six—that was only a year or two before Señor Grillet came to Curacao and bought this hotel, was it not?"

Van Maasdyk smoothed his whiskers. "He came here, I believe, about nineteen five or six. Hortensia, I remember, was about three years old. I attended her during an attack of fever."

"Sixto y Carrera," repeated the inspector. "That must have been this woman's name after her marriage with some man by the name of Sixto. Then Grillet moved from Caracas to this island . . . Let me talk to Hortensia, Doctor."

The two men reentered the hallway and found the girl still sobbing and wiping her eyes with the back of her wrist to avoid getting the dustcloth in her face.

"*Fraulein,*" said the inspector, "have you any memory of your early life—where you were and what you did as a child?"

"I have always lived here, *Herr* Inspector."

"Do you remember your mother?"

"She died when I was born, *Herr* Inspector. This leaves me all alone." The girl began sobbing afresh.

The inspector changed the direction of his queries. "Have you been

up here all morning, Hortensia?"

"Coming and going, *mynheer.*"

"Was your father up here too?"

"He came and went as usual, *mynheer.*"

"Did he seem in good health?"

"He was never any other way, *Herr* Heinsius—in fact he seemed more lively than usual this morning." The girl burst out weeping again as she talked of her father.

"There, there, Hortensia. I remember when my own father died . . ."

"Oh, *Herr* Inspector! Oh, if I had only known, *Herr* Heinsius! I can never tell him how sorry I am!"

"Poor child, I am sure it amounted to nothing."

"But it was the first time he ever spoke sharply to me in all my life! He was carrying breakfast to the room of *Señor* Pompalone and *Señor* Afanador."

"What did you quarrel about, my poor Hortensia?"

"The wine—he had been down in the cellar after some very fine wine. He said they were going to have a rare breakfast together."

The inspector's attention turned to the girl. "They? Who, Hortensia? *Señor* Pompalone and *Señor* Afanador?"

"They and my father. He meant to eat with them. They were countrymen of his. And he was coming up the stairs with three bottles of rare old wine and I took them, meaning to rub the cobwebs from them, when my father cried out, 'Caramba, Hortensia, you are as stupid as the Dutch! Don't you realise that cobwebs grace a wine bottle as pearls did the neck of your beautiful mother?" But I said, 'Father, it is so dirty!' And he said, 'Attend to your rooms and let me alone!' "

Inspector Heinsius was now engrossed in the girl's narrative. "So your father ate with his guests?"

"Yes, *mynheer,* he always showed honor to any of his own countrymen."

"I see. Will you please show us the room these men occupied, Hortensia?"

"I haven't cleaned away the breakfast things yet, *Herr* Heinsius."

"That's all right. I've seen breakfast things before—just show us the room."

The girl opened a door and displayed an unmade room with the leavings of a breakfast on a little center table. On the plates were the remains of a sea-turtle steak, broiled flying fish, a salad of alligator pears, three bottles of wine, some grafted mangoes from Trinidad, the inevitable wineglasses, coffee cups and tiny liqueur glasses of Curacao.

The inspector glanced around and saw the salver on which the things had been brought. He picked it up and began rearranging the dishes on it. "May I ask you to open that window screen a moment, *Herr* Doctor?"

The doctor swung open the screen and the inspector placed the

tray on the window sill inside the bars. Then he went to the door again and called the girl. "Hortensia, when your father brought in this breakfast did he and his guests eat immediately?"

"Yes, *mynheer,*" gasped the girl, about to weep again.

The inspector frowned thoughtfully. "You're sure your father remained in this room from the very moment he brought in the tray till the meal was eaten?"

The girl evidently tried to remember, then said doubtfully, "I think he did." Then she said, "Oh, look, the screen's open—the room will get full of flies!"

"Yes, I opened it. And your father was not called out?"

"Yes, he was," said Hortensia. "Our Negro boy, Zubio, came up and wanted a special wine for one of the Americans downstairs. Father had to go down and get it for him."

"So your father left this tray in this room and went back to get wine for the American—then came back and had his breakfast?"

"Yes, *mynheer.*"

"Very well—thank you, Hortensia."

Heinsius turned back to the window, followed by the physician. Here the officer stood looking over the tray. In one wineglass and on the neck of one bottle lay half a dozen dead houseflies, two or three bees and one of the curiously marked "89" butterflies which are found in the West Indies.

The inspector studied these dead insects and nodded. Then he said to Van Maasdyk with a certain professional pride in his voice, "You see, Doctor, this is a rude but fairly effective test for poison. No doubt Cesar Pompalone dropped something in his host's bottle when he left the room."

Dr. van Maasdyk stared at the inspector. "But, *Herr* Heinsius—Pompalone, the ex-dictator of Venezuela—what could he have against a poor tavern keeper in Curacao?"

The inspector lifted his hands. "I guess that Hortensia's mother was not *Señor* Grillet's wife. The photograph suggests it—the name on the photograph was Sixto. But that's a mere guess—the trial jury will have to search out the motive if they want any. I don't. I'll go down and arrest the two men. You can bring this wineglass and bottle as evidence."

"We'll have to keep this from Hortensia as long as we can, Heinsius," Van Maasdyk cautioned, "at least until after the shock of her father's death."

The two men went downstairs into the lobby under the inquiring glances of the guests of the hotel. So pronounced was the scrutiny that the inspector, who was by nature a courteous man, lifted his hand to the group, then walked over to the powerful and picturesque figure of the Magnificent Pompalone, who stood somewhat withdrawn from the other patrons of the establishment. He spoke in an undertone.

"Pardon me, *Señor* Pompalone, but may I ask you to come with me for a moment to my office in Leindenstraat. I would like to ask you some questions."

Pompalone looked intently at the officer. "Couldn't you ask your questions here, *Herr* Inspector?" he inquired in English.

"I might. Didn't *Señor* Grillet take breakfast with you in your room about two hours ago?"

"He did."

"I have the wine left in his bottle and glass. I have evidence that suggests it has been poisoned. Until we can prove that the wine is harmless or that you personally did not tamper with it I will have to hold you under arrest."

The ex-dictator started in cold astonishment, first at the inspector, then at his traveling companion, *Señor* Afanador.

"*Herr* Inspector," he asked, "do you consider it possible that I, a fugitive from my own country, would be so mad as to further complicate my already harassed flight by committing a murder in the first safe port I reached?"

"But, *Señor* Pompalone, I found poisoned wine left on your breakfast table, where Grillet had eaten."

"Then I ask would I have been so childish as to keep the remains of the poison in my room? Besides, what motive would I have to murder the first man who took me in?"

"I can't go into your motive here, *Señor* Pompalone."

"*Cá!* Then you have discovered a motive!"

"I suspect one. It has something to do with a woman, with a *Señora* Sixto."

"*A Señora* Sixto?" The Venezuelan ruminated on the name, "Sixto—*Sixto.*" Again he glanced at his companion, Afanador.

Then he said, "You must realise, *Herr* Inspector, I must frame my defense as quickly as possible. May I have a sample of the poisoned wine?"

Van Maasdyk instantly poured a little into the glass and offered it to the dictator.

"Now will someone bring me a piece of shell—conch, oyster, any sort of shell?"

Heinsius motioned to Barneveldt, who left the lobby and returned with a piece of abalone. The dictator dipped the shell into the wine several times, watching the reaction closely. Presently, the pearly tint of the nacre turned cream color, which later strengthened to yellow.

"*Señores,*" he said, looking at the yellowed shell, "this is a test I have made at frequent intervals during my presidency of Venezuela. This is a poison obtained from the Orinocan Indians and is called *Las Ojas de la Culebra.*"

"Are you admitting your guilt?" asked the inspector.

"Not at all, *Herr* Inspector—establishing my innocence. I have had so many attempts made on my life I feel this was also directed at me and went astray."

"Who do you think it was, *Señor* Pompalone?"

"I have a theory which I prefer not to state openly but I would like to make a request of this group of *caballeros*."

"Certainly, anything you please."

"Gentlemen," said Pompalone, "as you see, I am about to be placed under arrest and will not be free to construct my own defense. Now, when travelers are dispersed, which will be within a day or two, my defense will be impossible to make, for naturally someone in this hotel used this poison. So, if it is to be done at all it must be done at once.

"Now I ask, if there is any criminologist, secret-service man or trained investigator in this hotel, would he oblige a fellow traveler by aiding him in freeing himself? I would greatly appreciate it and would reward him well."

"Why don't you hire a lawyer here in the city?" suggested the inspector.

"Because I want an investigator who can produce absolute evidence."

The travelers stared at this strange request. Presently one of the Americans said, "I'll have a shot at it, Mr. Pompalone. I'm a great reader of detective stories."

Pompalone glanced at him. "What's your profession?"

"I'm a commercial traveler. I sell soap."

"You sell soap in the West Indies?"

"That's my occupation," said the salesman.

"Then I'm afraid you lack the reasoning faculty if you are trying to sell soap in the West Indies. Is there anyone else?"

There was a cavalier humor about this which gained the sympathy of the crowd. A smallish dark-eyed man with a marked academic appearance, spoke up. "If you are really innocent, *Señor* Pompalone," he said crisply, "I can demonstrate that scientifically in about thirty minutes. But if you are not really innocent I would do you more harm than good."

"That's splendid if you can make good your word. Are you a criminologist, *señor?*"

"No, I'm an instructor in psychology. My name is Poggioli."

"Are you from an Italian university?"

"No, an American of Italian parentage. I teach at Ohio State University. I'm taking my sabbatical year. To get back to my proof of your innocence, I can demonstrate it very simply."

"How?"

"By giving you scopothalamin and simply asking you the question, 'Did you poison *Señor* Grillet?' If you did you will say so—if you did not you will say so. The drug deadens all sense of caution."

Heinsius spoke up. "We don't know any such drug as that in our criminal practice here in Curacao."

"I'm aware of that," said Poggioli. "I'm simply explaining a method of finding out the truth almost instantly."

"Mr. Poggioli," inquired the inspector courteously, "would you expect me to turn a prisoner loose on such evidence?"

"Wouldn't you prefer to release an innocent man, even in an unconventional manner, than see him go to jail for life or perhaps to the gallows?"

Here the Magnificent Pompalone smilingly interrupted the colloquy. "Gentlemen, allow me a word. It is true I did not poison *Señor* Grillet. However, I have innumerable other things in my mind which I would not expose for my fortune or my life. So, if my freedom depended upon my taking this new drug and telling all I know I would go very cheerfully to the gallows instead."

Poggioli hesitated, then said, "You don't care for my assistance?"

"On the contrary, I'll be happy to enlist you in my behalf—but work on facts, not on my sense of caution. Also, I would like Inspector Heinsius to place me in my room here in the hotel under guard and allow this gentleman the privilege of consulting with me at any time he sees fit."

Heinsius considered, then agreed. He called Barneveldt, then motioned to Pompalone's traveling companion, *Señor* Afanador. These three, together with the American psychologist, mounted the stairs to the dictator's suite.

On the second floor *Señor* Afanador and Cesar Pompalone went into their separate apartments and the dictator nodded for the inspector and Poggioli to follow him. When the door was closed Pompalone turned suddenly from suave self-possession to flushed and swollen anger.

"*Señores,*" he whipped out, "I know the man who committed this outrage." He shook a finger toward *Señor* Afanador's room. "That traitor! That serpent! That crawling *Pizanista!*"

"But, señor," interrupted Poggioli, "what grounds have you for your charges?"

"Isn't Grillet dead? I had nothing to do with it, so Afanador must have done it!"

"But if he is a traitor and a *Pizanista,* what motive had he in killing *Señor* Grillet and not you, *Señor* Pompalone?"

"*Ca,* there's the subtlety of it, *Señor* Poggioli!" said the dictator. "I am worth more to the *Pizanista* alive in prison than dead. As long as I live there will be no other leader of my cause but once I am dead some other patriot will spring up!"

He stood staring at the two men. "All I ask of you, *Señor* Poggioli, is to prove to *Herr* Inspector that this vile and perfidious wretch, Afanador, my secretary, sold out to my enemies and tried to betray me!"

"But, *Señor* Pompalone—"

"*Señor* Poggioli, this is the solution. Now prove it!"

"I was going to say," persisted Poggioli, "this doesn't take into account the photograph of the

Señora Sixto which *Herr* Heinsius mentioned, and the strange entry which *Señor* Grillet made on the back of the picture as he was dying."

Pompalone snapped his fingers. "I have it—he timed the poison. He knew when *Señor* Grillet would expire. So he slipped into the *señor's* room, found a picture—any picture of a woman—made this entry to give it an appearance of mystery, to involve me in an imaginary intrigue. Who is *Señora* Sixto? Nobody knows. It's elementary!"

Inspector Heinsius wore a skeptical look on his broad Dutch face. "It seems to me, *Señor* President, it is not simple at all. I can't imagine a man working out a crime in such detail."

"*Herr* Heinsius," said Poggioli, "I ask you not to discard my client's theory merely because it is foreign to your Northern temperament. What sounds far-fetched to a Hollander may be a most natural procedure to a Latin."

Heinsius gave a faint shrug. "I see you are a man of learning, *Herr* Professor, but I have had twenty-four years of experience as an inspector. I have found that when a woman comes into a murder she is a real woman."

"This may be the exception. Now I suggest we go to *Señor* Afanador and hear his version of the tragedy."

Pompalone made a movement. "Let him alone, *señores*. He will prejudice you against me. I don't doubt he will swear to you that he saw me place the poison in the bottle with my own hands!"

"That will be difficult proof to offset," said the inspector.

"*Dios in cielo,* it will be!" cried the dictator. "To be laid by the heels by such a scurvy liar, such a foul maggot of a spy! *Cá!*"

The two Northerners left the room, moved in spite of themselves by the Venezuelan's melodramatics. In the hallway they passed Barneveldt on guard and a moment later entered the apartment of *Señor* Afanador.

At first glance the room appeared empty. But the next moment Poggioli was somewhat annoyed to see the secretary pressed closely against the door communicating between his own and Pompalone's room.

When he saw Poggioli and Heinsius, instead of exhibiting shame, he drew a breath of relief and came toward them, panting. "*Señores,*" he said in a whisper, dabbing his brow, "I know that His Excellency suspects me in this matter, does he not?"

Heinsius nodded briefly. "He does, *Señor* Afanador."

The secretary stretched out a hand that trembled. "*Ole! señores,* I—" He glanced with widened eyes at the door. "Is that lock strong?" he whispered.

"Certainly," said the inspector. "It would hold an ox. Nobody can get through it without a key."

Afanador breathed a little more easily. He smiled wryly. "*Señores,*

you won't require a guard to keep me in this room."

The inspector's contempt for a coward was evident as he said, "*Señor* Afanador, I suppose you are prepared to say that you saw *Señor* Pompalone drop the poison in the wine bottle?"

"*Caramba!*" cried the secretary. "I am prepared to say nothing of the sort! His Excellency is as innocent of that murder as a saint in heaven!"

Poggioli stared at this direct denial of what he had expected to hear. Then he observed that Afanador made this statement in a loud tone. He went immediately to him and asked under his breath, "Is that your real opinion, *Señor* Afanador?"

"*Si, si, señor,*" he nodded earnestly, now speaking in an undertone himself. "I *know* His Excellency had nothing whatever to do with the poisoning."

Heinsius stared. "Then why are you shivering and shaking and asking about that lock if you are going to stand by your employer like a man?"

The fellow's face, which had resumed a little color, went sickly again. "Because His Excellency suspects me, *señores,*" he whispered. "Do you know, up until now he has had nine private secretaries? They are—" He waggled a finger dolefully. "One after the other they fell under his suspicion—some for one reason, some for another.

"His Excellency is so much more valuable than we. Perhaps we are innocent, well—we die for our country. We are patriots! I have heard His Excellency explain it many times. We are all patriots—I am the tenth patriot."

Poggioli was moved to an equivocal sympathy and disgust. There was more than a hint in this of the old Inca caste which caused subject Indians to lay down their lives in unquestioning self-sacrifice for their rulers. He recalled that much Venezuelan blood is of Indian origin.

Herr Heinsius muttered a contemptuous oath under his breath.

"Help us clear the matter up, Afanador," said Poggioli. "If you can show another murderer he will no longer suspect you."

"Do you know who did it?" questioned the inspector bluntly.

"I don't know who did it but I know when it was done."

Heinsius said, "That isn't a very difficult problem. It was done when *Señor* Grillet went to his cellar, naturally."

"*Ye-es,*" admitted the secretary. "But I can be even more exact than that. It was done when His Excellency and I walked with *Señor* Grillet down the hallway to the head of the staircase."

"Did all three of you leave the room together?" inquired the inspector in astonishment.

"*Ciertamente, señor!*" said Afanador. "We had paid for our rooms. In a way we were the hosts of

Señor Grillet and you do not imagine we would allow a guest to walk out of our room unaccompanied! When we returned I observed that someone had entered during our absence and moved the wine bottles."

"How long did you stay out of your room?"

"Ten or fifteen minutes, *señores.* Neither of us had seen Curacao before and we stood at the window, looking out on the canal and the houses."

"And who do you think came in and tampered with your wine?" interrupted Heinsius.

Afanador spread his hands. "*Señores,* I believe some spy, some *Pizanista,* followed us here from La Guayra, slipped into our room when His Excellency and I were out and poisoned our wine."

Heinsius shrugged. "Moonshine, Poggioli, every tale they concoct fizzles into moonshine. Pompalone poisoned Grillet over an old affair with a woman and that ends it."

"Just a moment, Inspector—*Señor* Afanador, have you any theory why this supposed spy did not poison all three of the bottles and be sure of killing Pompalone?"

"That would have cast suspicion on some fourth person and he himself might have been apprehended. The logical thing was to kill one man. The other two would certainly be arrested while the actual poisoner would be free of any suspicion at all."

The inspector laughed. "*Señor* Afanador, you have concocted the flimsiest story of all—a third mysterious Venezuelan unseen, unknown, floating into your room and poisoning your wine in a fifteen-minute interval."

The secretary flushed. "*Señores,* I swear to you somebody tampered with our bottles while His Excellency and I were out. They were moved. I know they were moved!"

"Well, anyway," said the inspector ironically, "I don't suspect *you* of the crime, *Señor* Afanador, and I don't believe the court will either."

"But, *señores!*" cried the secretary, "I would give my life a thousand times for His Excellency. He alone can save my poor country."

The inspector turned on his heel and walked out of the room. When Poggioli followed and closed the door Heinsius reiterated, "There's no use pursuing their investigations. Their suspicions chase around and around, like a puppy after its tail."

Poggioli looked at Barneveldt. "I think someone did enter their room during their absence, *Herr* Heinsius," he said.

The inspector stared. "Surely Afanador hasn't converted you to the theory of the imaginary spy!"

"No, but everybody was downstairs at breakfast except these two men and the girl Hortensia."

The inspector, who was staring down the stairway, stopped and stared at his companion. "*Gott im Himmel, Herr* Professor! What are you saying? Not that poor little

Hortensia murdered her own father!"

The American lifted a hand. "I know she is your friend—that you feel almost like a father to her. But she herself told you she had quarreled with her father about the wine bottles."

"*Ach*, yes, but it was only a little quarrel. She only wanted to wipe the cobwebs off the bottles, *Herr* Poggioli."

"True, but she is an only child and probably a spoiled one. And then she is of Venezuelan blood. Perhaps she committed this mad act in a moment of fury. Now look at her—her grief is uncontrollable."

"Why, that's scandalous! She is as innocent as a saint in paradise!"

"I certainly hope so," said Poggioli warmly. "But in solving a problem, *Herr* Heinsius, it is our duty to pursue every line of evidence."

"I will get her. I'm sure you will find her—as you have found all the other witnesses—quite innocent." With a faintly ironic bow Inspector Heinsius set out up the hallway to find the *Señorita* Hortensia Grillet. Poggioli entered his client's room to await their return.

He found Pompalone standing by the barred window of his room, staring at the shipping along the canal as if it were an enemy's works he meant presently to charge.

As the American entered Pompalone turned and said, "I suppose *Señor* Afanador testified against me in every detail?"

"No," said Poggioli, "quite the contrary." And he told what Afanador had said, how he had expressed a desire to give his life for Pompalone's freedom.

"Don't you see the subtlety of this viper?" the Magnificent Pompalone cried. "He has concocted a perfectly unbelievable tale to cast a darker suspicion upon me. A second *Pizanista* on my trail!"

"But, *Señor Pompalone*, is it a fact that you and *Señor* Afanador accompanied *Señor* Grillet to the head of the steps this morning and remained at the window for several minutes before returning to your rooms?"

"Certainly," snapped the dictator. "But nobody entered our room in our absence. Who was there in the second story to do it?"

Poggioli saw it was impossible to discuss the secretary's theory. He stepped outside again and saw Heinsius standing down the hallway, a pleased expression on his broad brown face.

"What are you waiting for?" Poggioli called impatiently.

The inspector winked silently in reply.

"What is it?"

"Nothing at all," said the Dutchman. "I've thought of a little plan to trick this scoundrelly Venezuelan."

"You have? How?"

The Dutchman studied Poggioli. "You won't warn your client?"

"*No!*" snapped the American. "If

he's guilty I'm as keen to see him hanged as you are!"

"So—I told Hortensia to put on her mother's clothes."

"What for?"

"You know how much like the photograph Hortensia is. Perhaps when Pompalone sees the girl he will be shocked into a restoration of his memory."

Poggioli was moved with admiration. "By George, Heinsius! I'll give you an 'A' on that!"

"Thanks!" replied the inspector, gratified.

Three minutes later a door opened and Hortensia Grillet came out. The girl wore a black dress with a band of mourning purple at her bosom. Her dust cap was gone and her dark hair was piled high after the stately fashion of a Venezuelan *señorita.* About her neck hung a string of matched pearls.

The two men stared at the tranformation. Almost as an afterthought in the wake of her loveliness, Poggioli recalled what he had meant to ask the girl.

"*Señorita,*" he said a little awkwardly, "I have a question to ask you. This morning when your father went to his wine cellar did you see *Señor* Pompalone and *Señor* Afanador come from their room and stand looking out the hall window at the canal?"

"*Si, señor.*" The girl nodded.

"And may I ask, *señorita,* if you or any other person entered their breakfast room while they were out?"

"I did, *señor,*" breathed Hortensia.

"And what did you do in there, *señorita?*" queried the psychologist, studying her face intently.

"*Señor,* I—one of the wine bottles was so cobwebby. I could not endure to see it set before Venezuelan *caballeros.* So I slipped in and wiped it clean." She was about to cry again.

"Don't feel so badly about it, Hortensia. That was all you did?"

"*Si, señor.*"

Poggioli nodded. "That shows Afanador was right in this respect, *Herr* Heinsius. Someone *did* enter the room in their absence."

"I hope I did nothing wrong," said the girl in alarm.

"Not at all," assured Heinsius. "Now I want you to come with me and repeat what you have just told me to *Señor* Pompalone."

They passed the sentry, Barneveldt, and went into the dictator's room. The Magnificent Pompalone had flung himself down on a sofa. As the group entered he looked up, saw Hortensia and sprang to his feet with a swift change of expression.

"Maria in heaven!" he exclaimed in amazement. "Is this the exquisite Ana Carrera again? Has my good angel so blessed me?"

The girl was bewildered. "*Señor* Pompalone, Ana Carrera was my mother."

"Your mother!'

"*Si, señor.*"

"Is it possible! Why, *señorita,*

you are her very flesh and spirit! The same look, the same soft music of her speech . . ."

The girl blushed. "My mother died when I was born, *señor.*"

"*Pobrecita!*" The Magnificent Pompalone crossed himself, then went to her and with the utmost gentleness pressed her small work-hardened fingers to his lips. "Poor little dove, left all alone in the world."

Hortensia caught a breath that lifted her bosom and her pearls. "*Si, señor,* my mother and father are both gone now."

Pompalone touched the jewels with delicate fingers. "*Ole! señorita,* these were Ana's pearls. I remember how long I was collecting them from Margharita Island. The divers —"

"Oh, *señor,* did you gather these pearls for my mother?"

"And I could swear they are about her neck this moment!"

"Am I indeed like her?"

"As two orchids from one stem!"

"Was her hair as black?"

"It was like a silken summer night."

The girl stretched her hands toward Pompalone. "*Mia madrecita!* My poor little mother!" She began to weep once more.

Neither Heinsius nor Poggioli was so hardened as to break into the girl's eager questioning about her lost mother. They stepped quietly out of the room.

Inspector Heinsius drew a long breath. "So-o!" he breathed. "It was as I expected. He gave himself completely away over a woman. *Herr* Professor, these Latins are incomprehensible beings—so subtle, so simple, so like fiends out of hell and yet so lovable." He sighed, then added quite irrelevantly, "*Ach,* I'm glad I didn't marry one."

Then he said that he would go back to his office, send men back to arrest Pompalone and throw him in jail. Poggioli was depressed over the interview upstairs. He asked the inspector to keep Pompalone under guard in the hotel that afternoon and give him time to think over the problem.

"Come back and dine with me here this evening," he suggested, "and I'll tell you the result of my analysis."

The Dutchman shrugged. "There can be but one result, *Herr* Professor."

"I'm afraid so," agreed Poggioli. "And yet *Señor* Pompalone wears every aspect of innocence."

Poggioli accompanied his friend to the door and watched him shoulder his way through the half-gale that was sweeping along the street. As he turned back into the lobby a group of the guests watched him and the American salesman called boldly, "Poggioli, what did you find out—did the dictator kill him?"

"I don't know," said the psychologist heavily and hurried upstairs.

There Poggioli asked Barneveldt where *Señorita* Grillet had gone.

"To her room, *mynheer,*" answered the guard.

Poggioli was vaguely disappointed. He wanted to question Hortensia a little further. But he didn't want to disturb her in her room. He moved on, his mood tuned to the gray tragedy, thinking over its conflicting details. His steps carried him into the private library where *Señor* Grillet's body was laid out for burial.

He walked over to the greenheart table, picked up the photograph with the two enigmatic annotations on its back. He read them silently, "Account of *12 de agosto,* 1906. Account settled *5 de enero,* 1925."

Poggioli wondered if the dead man, lying under the white sheet on the cane settee, had stolen Pompalone's wife or betrothed on that August day in 1906. The riddle had come back to the inspector's simple solution—"I have found that when a woman comes into a murder she is a real woman."

So it had proved.

But there was a snarl somewhere in the burden of proof. Poggioli could not imagine Pompalone slipping poison into a wine bottle. Afanador would have done that. He began reviewing Pompalone's case against his secretary. This also was too nebulous, too fantastic.

Poggioli reviewed other details of the tragedy—the murdered man's anger with his daughter for wanting to clean the bottles, her disobedience in slipping into the room and dusting them after his injunction, the girl's eagerness to hear about her mother, of whom, evidently, her father never spoke.

Still Cesar Pompalone seemed to hold no bitterness against Ana Sixto y Carrera. This too seemed not quite in keeping with his temperament. In fact, the only suggestion of the dictator's innocence was psychological. What would a jury of hard-headed Curacaoan Dutch make of a defense founded on psychology?

The wind was piping an eerie threnody about the eaves of the big hotel. The dead man, done to death by some mysterious assailant, lay on the long wicker couch with a sheet drawn to his chin. On the table, beside the photograph of the woman, lay the contents of the dead man's pockets.

It occurred to Poggioli that this woman had not come to Curacao with the tavern keeper. According to Van Maasdyk, *Herr* Heinsius had said, *Señor* Grillet arrived in Curacao accompanied only by his baby girl, Hortensia. He could not piece together these details of the tragedy.

In an effort to relieve his mind he opened one of the bookcases and selected two or three volumes. They were old-fashioned romances of revenge, *The Corsican Brothers, Vendetta, The Count Balderschino.* Apparently the whole library was of this tenor.

It struck the investigator that *Señor* Grillet had been fearing this very fate, which explained the

mystery of the last notation on the portrait. He had expiated his abduction of Pompalone's wife or mistress. His account had been settled with his life.

The Magnificent Pompalone had done this man to death. It was out of character but Pompalone was even more Latin than the American-Italian who was trying to understand his crime—and an individual of one race is always more or less out of character to a man of another.

From the lower story floated the three notes of the dinner gong, repeated over and over. Even if the storm brewed and men were murdered, travelers had to eat.

In the lobby Poggioli found *Herr* Heinsius awaiting him. They went together to the dining room, which was already full, took a small table in a corner. The Negro, Zubio, brought them water and the menu. The inspector looked over the good Dutch dishes with pleased eyes.

"Suppose we discuss our problem after we eat, *Herr* Professor," suggested Heinsius with a Dutchman's respect for a good meal.

"We don't have to," said Poggioli. "I have reached a decision."

"You have?"

"Yes, I agree with you."

"*Ach,*" exclaimed the inspector. "I'm sorry to hear it, *Herr* Professor. I had hoped somehow you would fasten the murder elsewhere than on *Herr* Pompalone. But the facts remain facts." Zubio approached with the soup. "Let us think no more about it until after we have dined." He began swathing himself with a huge napkin while his mild eyes shone at the clear green-turtle soup.

Over the big dining room the other guests were eating in accordance with their national manners. All were mutually bad-mannered, each to the other. The American soap salesman drummed his knife on the table and called to Zubio, "Come here, you!"

As Zubio approached he began in an offended tone, "Do you call this stuff wine?"

Zubio bobbed.

"Well, *I* call it ditchwater! Have you got anything a man can drink?"

"*Si, senyo.*"

The American flipped out a coin. "Go bring me the best you've got in this joint."

"Yah, yessuh, *si, oui, m'sieu,*" Zubio hurried away, and presently Poggioli heard him calling in the lobby.

"*Señorita! Un Americano* wants the best wine—"

Poggioli cursed the salesman for disturbing the grief-stricken girl over a glass of wine. After awhile the *señorita* came into the dining room and approached the salesman.

"*Señor,*" she said in a low tone, "nobody but Father knew much about the wine. I don't know which is the best or the worst."

"Bring me the oldest," ordered the American."

The girl said to Zubio, "You will

find the key to the wine cellar among Father's things on the library table upstairs." Then she hurried from the room.

Poggioli condemned the salesman. Then he began pondering what the girl had just said—her father kept the key to the wine cellar. He recalled once more that *Señor* Grillet had quarreled with his daughter that morning over cleaning the dusty bottles. Both points were odd—Grillet's anger at the girl for offering to polish a bottle, the fact that she had slipped in and cleaned it anyway.

A cat rubbed against his ankle and disturbed the delicate skein of his thoughts. A moment later Zubio entered with a single cobwebbed bottle of amber liquid borne aloft on a silver tray. He carried it to the salesman's table and began opening it with elaborate ceremony.

As Zubio was pouring the liquid into the American's glass Poggioli picked up the cat and strode toward the salesman's table. "Just a moment," he called. "Put that glass down, sir! Let me test it before you drink it!"

The soap salesman stared at Poggioli in amazement. "Where the hell do you come in?"

"I don't know exactly. But give me a spoonful of that wine. I believe it's dangerous!"

The American stared with glass uplifted but he did not drink. He got his spoon and dipped into the liquid. Poggioli produced the cat. "Pour some down its throat. I'll hold its mouth open!"

A chorus of ejaculations rose from the other tables. Inspector Heinsius hurried to Poggioli's side. The cat mewed and scratched but the wine was poured into its mouth.

After a moment of watching he commanded, "Another spoonful."

"You're kidding me!" cried the salesman, growing red in the face.

"You try it, Inspector," Poggioli directed.

Heinsius reached for the spoon. As he tried to pour more wine in the cat's mouth he exclaimed, "*Ach!* The creature's dead!"

The soap salesman turned white. "Dead! How come it's dead? What killed it?"

Excited comments rose throughout the room. Inspector Heinsius was amazed. "*Herr* Professor, how did you know?"

"Come outside," said Poggioli. "We can't talk here."

The inspector ordered Zubio to hold the poisoned wine as evidence and the two men went into the lobby. But the lobby was quickly filled from the dining room. The inspector and Poggioli passed on out the door into the night together. A gale laden with spume whipped them as they entered the canal side.

They turned down a side street, leaning against the occasional gusts that swept the narrow thoroughfare. After they had walked some distance the inspector said, "Why did you suspect that bottle of wine

was poisoned? It came straight from the cellar."

"The thing that set me off," said Poggioli, lifting his voice, "was the fact that the bottle was cobwebbed and dusty, exactly like the one *Señor* Grillet served the men upstairs. Added to that was a complex of associated ideas touching Grillet's quarrel with his daughter.

"*Herr* Heinsius, what we call reason is never the sure mathematical progression we believe it is. It is a cloudy process, a kind of blind jumping among hypotheses. When it finally hits the right one it then proceeds to build a logical bridge from its point of departure to its goal and imagines it has crossed on that bridge. But it has not—the bridge was flung out afterward."

The inspector laughed. "That's all right, *Herr* Professor. I am neither an undergraduate nor a fellow in psychology. Why should Grillet poison himself? Why should Zubio have brought up another poisoned bottle out of a cellar of good wine? Why—"

"Take one question at a time," cried Poggioli. "Zubio brought up a poisoned bottle because he picked out the oldest in the cellar, according to the order of the soap salesman."

"Why should the oldest be poisoned?"

"Because *Señor* Grillet brought a case of poisoned wine with him from Venezuela when he came to Curacao some twenty years ago."

"You don't mean," said the inspector, "you thought all this out when you leaped up and ran to the American!"

"No. I received what is called a hunch! When we analyze hunches we find they are composed of an instinctive correlation of facts which have not yet reached the surface of consciousness."

"But why did Grillet bring poisoned wine with him from Caracas twenty years ago?"

"Because the Magnificent Pompalone had stolen his wife. You see we approached the problem with a reversed theory. We worked on the idea that Pompalone had a grievance against *Señor* Sixto, *alias* Grillet, and murdered him for it. In reality Sixto had a grievance against Pompalone.

"If we had paused to consider feminine nature we might have known that a man like Grillet could never have alienated the wife of a man like Pompalone. On the contrary, what could be more natural than the dictator seizing on the wife of some humble fellow and possessing her?"

The inspector nodded in the darkness. "That hangs together all right, *Herr* Professor. And then what happened?"

"Grillet or Sixto took his infant daughter and a case of poisoned wine and emigrated from Venezuela to Curacao. Here he set up the finest hostelry in the city."

"Perhaps he had been a tavern-keeper in Caracas?"

"I doubt it. I feel sure *Señor* Sixto reasoned Pompalone would be deposed eventually—that he would fly for sanctuary to Curacao, which is the nearest free port to Venezuela. He knew Pompalone would lodge in the finest hostelry in the city. Therefore, to accomplish his revenge, he must possess that finest hotel, together with his case of poisoned wine."

Heinsius nodded, impressed by Poggioli's extraordinary analysis. "Sixto accomplished his purpose," he said. "His meals were a delight, and his rooms as sweet as the sea air itself. Even his daughter, a native Venezuelan, was cleanlier than we Dutch."

"That is the irony of it, *Herr* Inspector. The very care with which *Señor* Sixto trained his daughter led to his own death. When Hortensia, who could endure nothing dirty or dusty, cleaned the cobwebs off the wine bottle in the breakfast room she killed her own father."

"How did she do that?" cried the officer in amazement.

"When *Señor* Sixto carried the breakfast with the poisoned wine to his guests, naturally he was excited. The vengeance of twenty years was about to be consummated. He meant to hand the Magnificent Pompalone the oldest, dustiest and cobwebbiest bottle on the platter with a pretty speech such as all Venezuelans know how to make, and poison him.

"When he met Hortensia on the upper floor she wanted to clean the poisoned bottle. That was his mark, the cobwebbing. It unstrung him. He reprimanded her severely. Then he was called down to the wine cellar, for naturally he never allowed anyone to enter that dangerous place except himself. His guests accompanied him to the stairs.

"Hortensia, annoyed by the dust, as he had trained her to be, saw her opportunity to slip in and clean the worst of the bottles, the poisoned one. When Sixto returned with the excitement of murder upon him, he did not observe the change. He gave his enemy the dustiest bottle and drank his own bane."

"*Herr* Heinsius, if it were in our power to exchange our earthiness for the high divan of the gods, if we could look down on this tragedy—*Herr* Heinsius, I think we, too, would have been moved, as were the Olympian gods, to enormous laughter."

The inspector said uneasily, "Well—I'm a good churchman myself."

"Oh, so am I," agreed Poggioli.

The two walked on with a feeling of spiritual disjunction at this little quirk in their conversation. Poggioli regretted he had mentioned his whimsy.

They had walked past the houses onto a little pleasure beach, which was quite deserted in the gale. A string of pale electric lights along the water's edge showed the curves of the incoming waves which marched in endless procession from

the dark Caribbean. Spindrift blew in past the lights in torn veils.

The inspector touched the scientist's arm and pointed out to sea. "There's a brave person out there," he called above the surf.

Poggioli looked and saw a red-and-green signal burning in the darkness. "Fisherman?" he asked.

"Native in a jack boat, I suppose. They brave any sea."

Heinsius had begun a description of jack boats—solid logs with the bottom hewn out—when he was interrupted by two figures silhouetted against the row of watery beach lights. A large man and a slight one were hurrying toward the surf.

Poggioli and Heinsius watched them curiously until the inspector gasped suddenly, *"Mein Gott!* That's the Magnificent Pompalone!" He dashed down the strand after the dictator.

Poggioli set out after him. "Let him go, *Herr* Inspector!" he shouted. "He hasn't committed any crime in this country!"

"Gott im Himmel, but he mustn't go back! That's worse than a crime! It's against business!" The inspector jerked out a pistol as he ran and shouted against the blast, *"Stop, Halt!* I'll *shoot!"*

But at that moment the two figures dashed across the last shining foot of sand and plunged headlong into the curve of an incoming wave.

Heinsius fired four shots into the surf, then with an oath turned his fire on the signal lights at sea. But perhaps the tossed sailors never knew that a man on shore was firing at them. After some fifteen minutes the signal lights blinked out.

As the two men turned back to the hotel Poggioli said, "Heinsius, I'm glad he's gone. He was a devil, no doubt, but there was something rather splendid about him."

"You mean he was Pompalone the Magnificent."

At this moment a figure dashed out of the side street, shouting as if the fiends were after him, *"Herr* Inspectuh! *Senyo* Inspectuh! Mistuh Inspectuh!" A white-eyed Zubio appeared out of the night.

"He's coming to tell us they're gone!" said the Dutchman.

"Herr Inspectuh!" Zubio gasped. "Come to the hotel, *pronto!* Quick!"

"I know they are gone, Zubio."

"Gone? *No!* Poor *Senyo* Afanador, someone has struck a dagger in his heart!"

Heinsius swayed in the gale. "What! Afanador murdered! *Mein Gott!* Where in the devil was Barneveldt?"

"Sitting by the door where you put him, *Herr* Inspectuh. Somebody opened the doors on the inside between all the rooms; somebody with a key; and now *Señorita* Hortensia is gone, run away, mad, perhaps."

Simultaneously Poggioli and Heinsius whirled and stared out into the black surf. They could see nothing at all.

the treasure hunt

by ⁂ *Ellery Queen*

Which tells of a thief clever enough to turn all obstacles to his advantage. Unfortunately for him Ellery Queen is on the scene.

DISMOUNT!" ROARED MAJOR General Barrett gayly, scrambling off his horse. "How's that for exercise before breakfast, Mr. Queen?"

"Oh, lovely," said Ellery, landing on *terra firma* somehow. The big bay tossed his head, visibly relieved. "I'm afraid my cavalry muscles are a little atrophied, general. W've been riding since six-thirty. Remember?" He limped to the edge of the cliff and rested his racked body against the low stone parapet.

Harkness uncoiled himself from the roan and said, "You lead a life of armchair adventure, Queen? It must be embarrassing when you poke your nose out into the world of men." He laughed.

Ellery eyed the man's yellow mane and nervy eyes with the unreasoning dislike of the chronic shut-in. That broad chest was untroubled after the gallop.

"Embarrassing to the horse," said Ellery. "Beautiful view, general. You couldn't have selected this site blindly. Must be a streak of poetry in your make-up."

"Poetry, your foot, Mr. Queen! I'm a military man."

The old gentleman waddled to Ellery's side and gazed down over

Messrs. Ellery (Fred Dannay) and Queen (Manfred Lee) have managed to achieve greater quantity, quality and variety than just about anyone else in all of mystery fiction. Novelists, dramatists etc., they also comprise what is called on TV "another network."

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the Hudson River, a blue-glass reflector under the young sun. The cliff was sheer. It fell cleanly to a very narrow strip of pebbled beach far below, where Major General Barrett had his boathouse. A zigzag of steep stone steps in the face of the cliff was the only means of descent.

An old man was seated on the edge of a little jetty below, fishing. He glanced up and, to Ellery's astonishment, sprang to his feet and snapped his free hand up in a stiff salute. Then he very placidly sat down and resumed his fishing.

"Braun," said the general, beaming. "Old pensioner of mine. Served under me in Mexico. He and Magruder, the old chap at the caretaker's cottage. You see? Discipline, that's it. Poetry?" He snorted. "Not for me, Mr. Queen. I like this ledge for its military value. Commands the river. Miniature West Point!"

Ellery turned and looked upward. The shelf of rock on which the general had built his home was surrounded on its other three sides by precipitous cliffs, quite unscalable, which towered so high that their crests were swimming in mist. A steep road had been blasted in the living rock of the rearmost cliff. It spiraled down from the top of the mountain and Ellery still remembered with vertigo the automobile descent the evening before.

"You command the river," he said dryly, "but an enemy could shoot the hell out of you by commanding that road up there. Or are my tactics infantile?"

The old gentleman spluttered, "Why, I could hold that gateway to the road against an army, man!"

"And the artillery," murmured Ellery. "Heavens, general, you *are* prepared." He glanced with amusement at a small sleek cannon beside the near-by flagpole, its muzzle gaping over the parapet.

"General's getting ready for the revolution," said Harkness with a lazy laugh. "We live in perilous times."

"You sportsmen," snapped the general. "have no respect whatever for tradition. You know very well this is a sunset gun. You don't sneer at the one on the Point, do you? That's the only way Old Glory," he concluded in a parade-ground voice, "will ever come down on *my* property, Harkness—to the boom of a cannon salute!"

"I suppose," said the big-game hunter, "my elephant gun wouldn't serve the same purpose? On *safari* I——"

"Ignore the fellow, Mr. Queen," said the general testily. "We just tolerate him on these week-ends because he's a friend of Lieutenant Fiske's. Too bad you arrived too late last night to see the ceremony. Quite stirring! You'll see it again at sunset today. Must keep up the old traditions. Part of my life, Mr. Queen. I guess I'm an old fool anyway."

"Oh, indeed not," said Ellery hastily. "Traditions are the back-

bone of the nation. Anybody knows that."

Harkness chuckled and the general looked pleased.

Ellery knew the type—retired army man, too old for service, pining for the military life. From what Dick Fiske, the general's prospective son-in-law, had told him on the way down the night before, Barrett had been a passionate and single-tracked soldier. He had taken over with him into civilian life as many mementos of the good old martial days as he could carry. Even his servants were old soldiers and the house, which bristled with relics of three wars, was run like a regimental barracks.

A groom led their horses away and they strolled back across the rolling lawns toward the house. Major General Barrett, Ellery was thinking, must be crawling with money. He had already seen enough to convince him of that. There were a tiled swimming pool outdoors, a magnificent solarium, a target range, a gun room with a variety of weapons that——

"General," said an agitated voice. Lieutenant Fiske, his uniform unusually disordered, was running toward them. "May I see you a moment alone, sir?"

"Of course, Richard. Excuse me, gentlemen?"

Harkness and Ellery hung back. The lieutenant said something, his arms jerking nervously, and the old gentleman paled. Then, without another word, both men broke into a run, the general waddling like a startled grandfather gander toward the house.

"I wonder what's eating Dick," said Harkness as he and Ellery followed more decorously.

"Leonie," ventured Ellery. "I've known Fiske for a long time. That ravishing daughter of the regiment is the only unsettling influence the boy's ever encountered. I hope there's nothing wrong."

"Pity if there is," said the big man. "It promised to be a restful weekend. I had my fill of excitement on my last expedition."

"Ran into trouble?"

"My boys deserted and a flood on the Niger did the rest. Lost everything. Lucky to have escaped with my life. Ah there, Mrs. Nixon. Is there anything wrong with Miss Barrett?"

A tall, pale woman with red hair and amber eyes looked up from the magazine she was reading. "Leonie? I haven't seen her this morning. Why?" She seemed not too interested. "Oh, Mr. Queen! That dreadful game we played last night kept me awake half the night. How can you sleep with all those murdered people haunting you?"

"My difficulty," murmured Ellery, "is not in sleeping too little, Mrs. Nixon, but in sleeping too much. The original sluggard. No more imagination than an amœba. Nightmare? You must have something on your conscience."

"But was it necessary to take our

fingerprints, Mr. Queen? I mean, a game's a game."

Ellery chuckled. "I promise to destroy my impromptu little bureau of identification at the very first opportunity."

"Queen," said Lieutenant Fiske from the doorway. His brown cheeks were muddy and mottled, and he held himself very stiffly. "Would you mind——"

"What's wrong, lieutenant?" demanded Harkness.

"Has something happened to Leonie?" asked Mrs. Nixon.

"Wrong? Why, nothing at all." The young officer smiled, took Ellery's arm and steered him to the stairs. He was smiling no longer. "Something rotten's happened, Queen. We're—we don't quite know what to do. Lucky you're here. You might know——"

"Now, now," said Ellery gently. "What's happened?"

"You remember that rope of pearls Leonie wore last night?"

"Oh," said Ellery.

"It was my engagement gift to her. Belonged to my mother." The lieutenant bit his lip. "I'm not—— well, a lieutenant in the United States Army can't buy pearls on his salary. I wanted to give Leonie something—expensive. Foolish of me, I suppose. Anyway I treasured mother's pearls for sentimental reasons too and——"

"You're trying to tell me," said Ellery as they reached the head of the stairs, "that the pearls are actually gone."

"Damn it all, yes!" she exclaimed.

"How much are they worth?"

"Twenty-five-thousand dollars. My father was wealthy once."

Ellery sighed. In the workshop of the cosmos it had been decreed that he should walk with open eyes among the sociologically lame and blind. He adjusted his pince-nez firmly on his nose and followed the officer into Leonie Barrett's bedroom.

There was nothing martial in Major General Barrett's bearing now. He was simply a fat old man with sagging shoulders. As for Leonie she had been crying and Ellery thought irrelevantly that she had used the hem of her *peignoir* to stanch her tears. But there was also a set to her chin and a gleam in her eye, and she pounced upon Ellery so quickly that he almost threw his arm up to defend himself.

"Someone's stolen my necklace," she said fiercely. "Mr. Queen, you must get it back. You *must*, do you hear?"

"Leonie, my dear," began the general in a feeble voice.

"No, father! I don't care who's going to be hurt. That—that rope of pearls meant a lot to Dick and it means a lot to me. I don't propose to sit by and let some thief snatch it right from under my nose!"

"But, darling," said the lieutenant miserably. "After all, your guests are——"

"Hang my guests and yours too," said the young woman with a toss

of her head. "I don't think there's anything in Emily Post's book which says a thief gathers immunity simply because he's present on an invitation."

"But it's certainly more reasonable to suspect that one of the servants——"

The general's head came up like a shot. "My dear Richard," he snapped, "put that notion out of your head. There isn't a man in my employ who hasn't been with me for at least twenty years. I'd trust any one of 'em with anything I have. I've tested their honesty and loyalty in a hundred ways."

"Since I'm one of the guests," said Ellery cheerfully, "I think I'm qualified to pass an opinion. Murder will out but it was never hindered by a bit of judicious investigation, lieutenant. Your fiancée's quite right. When did you discover the theft, Miss Barrett?"

"A half-hour ago when I awoke." Leonie pointed to the dressing table beside her four-poster bed. "Even before I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes I saw that the pearls were gone—because the lid of my jewel-box was up, as you see."

"And the box was closed when you retired last night?"

"Better than that. I awoke this morning feeling thirsty. I got out of bed for a glass of water and I distinctly remember that the box was closed at that time. Then I went back to sleep."

Ellery strolled over and glanced down at the box. Then he lighted a cigarette and said, "Happy chance. It's a little after eight now. You discovered the theft then at a quarter of eight or so. Therefore the probabilities are that the pearls were stolen between six and seven forty-five. Didn't you hear anything, Miss Barrett?"

Leonie smiled ruefully. "I'm a disgustingly sound sleeper, Mr. Queen. That's something you'll learn, Dick. And then for years I've suspected that I snore but nobody ever——"

The lieutenant blushed.

The general said, "Leonie," not very convincingly, and Leonie made a face and began to weep again, this time on the lieutenant's shoulder.

"What the devil are we to do?" snarled the general. "We can't—— well, hang it all, you just can't search people. Nasty business! If the pearls weren't so valuable, I'd say forget the whole thing."

"A body search is scarcely necessary, general," said Ellery. "No thief would be so stupid as to carry the loot about on his person. He'd expect the police to be called and the police, at least, are notoriously callous to the social niceties."

"Police," said Leonie in a damp voice, raising her head. "Oh, goodness. Can't we——"

"I think," said Ellery, "we can struggle along without them for the proverbial nonce. On the other hand a search of the premises—— Any objection to my prowling about?"

"None whatever," snapped

Leonie. "Mr. Queen, you prowl!"

"I believe I shall. By the way, who besides the four of us—and the thief—knows about this?"

"Not another soul."

"Very good. Now discretion is our shibboleth today. Please pretend nothing's happened. The thief will know we're acting but he'll be constrained to act too and perhaps ——" He smoked thoughtfully. "Suppose you dress and join your guests downstairs, Miss Barrett. Come, come, get that Wimpole Street expression off your face, my dear!"

"Yes, sir," said Leonie, trying out a smile.

"You gentlemen might coöperate. Keep everyone away from this floor while I go into my prowling act. I shouldn't like to have Mrs. Nixon, for example, catch me red-handed among her *brassières*."

"Oh," said Leonie suddenly. And she stopped smiling.

"What's the matter?" asked the lieutenant in an anxious voice.

"Well, Dorothy Nixon is up against it. Horribly short of funds. No, that's a—a rotten thing to say." Leonie flushed. "Goodness, I'm half naked! Now, please, clear out."

"Nothing," said Ellery in an undertone to Lieutenant Fiske after breakfast. "It isn't anywhere in the house."

"Hell," said the officer. "You're positive?"

"Oh, quite. I've been through all the rooms—kitchen, solarium, pantry, armory. I've even visited the general's cellar."

Fiske gnawed his lower lip.

Leonie called gayly, "Dorothy and Mr. Harkness and I are going into the pool for a plunge. Dick! Coming?"

"Please go," said Ellery softly. And he added, "And while you're plunging, lieutenant, search that pool."

Fiske looked startled. Then he nodded rather grimly and followed.

"Nothing, eh?" said the general glumly. "I saw you talking to Richard."

"Not yet." Ellery glanced from the house, into which the others had gone to change into bathing costume, to the riverside. "Suppose we stroll down there, general. I want to ask your man Braun some questions."

They made their way cautiously down the stone steps in the cliff to the sliver of beach below, and found the old pensioner placidly engaged in polishing the brasswork of the general's launch.

"Mornin', sir," said Braun, snapping to attention.

"At ease," said the general moodily. "Braun, this gentleman wants to ask you some questions."

"Very simple ones," murmured Ellery. "I saw you fishing, Braun, at about eight this morning. How long had you been sitting on the jetty?"

"Well, sir," replied the old man, scratching his left arm, "on and off

since ha' past five. Bitin' early, they are. Got a fine mess."

"Did you have the stairs there in view all the time?"

"Sure thing, sir."

"Has anyone come down this morning?"

Braun shook his gray thatch.

"Has anyone approached from the river?"

"Not a one, sir."

"Did anyone drop or throw anything down here or into the water from the cliff up there?"

"If they'd had I'd 'a' heard, sir. No, sir."

"Thank you. Oh, by the way, Braun, you're here all day?"

"Well only till early afternoon, unless someone's usin' the launch, sir."

"Keep your eyes open then. General Barrett is especially anxious to know if anyone comes down this afternoon. If someone does, watch closely and report."

"General's orders, sir?" asked Braun, cocking a shrewd eye.

"That's right, Braun," sighed the general. "Dismissed."

"And now," said Ellery as they climbed to the top of the cliff, "let's see what friend Magruder has to say."

Magruder was a gigantic old Irishman with leathery cheeks and the eyes of a top sergeant. He occupied a rambling little cottage at the only gateway to the estate.

"No, sir," he said emphatically, "ain't been a soul near here all mornin'. Nobody in or out."

"But how can you be sure, Magruder?"

The Irishman stiffened. "From a quarter to six till seven thirty, I was a-settin' right there in full view of the gate a-cleanin' some of the gin'ral's guns, sir. And afther I was trimmin' the privets."

"You may take Magruder's word as gospel," snapped the general.

"I do, I do," said Ellery soothingly. "This is the only vehicular exit from the estate, of course, sir?"

"As you see."

"Yes, yes. And the cliffside. Only a lizard could scale those rocky side walls. Very interesting. Thanks, Magruder."

"Well, what now?" demanded the general, as they walked back toward the house.

Ellery frowned. "The essence of any investigation, general, is the question of how many possibilities you can eliminate. This little hunt grows enchantingly on that score. You say you trust your servants implicitly?"

"With anything."

"Then round up as many as you can spare and have them go over every inch of the grounds with a fine comb. Fortunately your estate isn't extensive and the job shouldn't take long."

"Hm-m-m." The general's nostrils quivered. "There's an idea! I see, I see. Splendid, Mr. Queen. You may trust my lads. Old soldiers, every one of 'em. They'll love it. And the trees?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"The trees, man, the trees! Crotches of 'em. Good hiding places."

"Oh," said Ellery gravely, "the trees. By all means search them thoroughly."

"Leave that to me," said the general fiercely and he trotted off breathing fire.

Ellery sauntered over to the pool, which churned with vigorous bodies, and sat on a bench to watch. Mrs. Nixon waved a shapely arm and dived under, pursued by a bronzed giant who turned out to be Harkness when his dripping curls reappeared. A slim slick figure shot out of the water almost at Ellery's feet, and in the same motion scaled the edge of the pool.

"I've done it," murmured Leonie, smiling and preening as if to invite Ellery's admiration.

"Done what?" mumbled Ellery, grinning back.

"Searched them."

"Searched! I don't understand."

"Oh, are *all* men fundamentally stupid?" Leonie leaned back and shook out her hair. "Why do you think I suggested the pool? So that everyone would have to take his clothes off! All I did was slip into a bedroom or two before going down myself. I searched *all* our clothes. It was possible the—the thief had slipped the pearls into some unsuspecting pocket, you see. Well—nothing."

Ellery looked at her. "Well—their bathing suits—— How about the——"

Leonie colored. Then she said firmly, "That was a long, six-stranded rope. Would you think Dorothy Nixon has it on her person now in that bathing suit?"

Ellery glanced at Mrs. Nixon. "I can't say," he chuckled, "that any of you in your present costumes could conceal an object larger than a fly's wing. Ah, there, lieutenant! How's the water?"

"No good," said Fiske, thrusting his dripping chin over the edge of the pool.

"Why, Dick!" exclaimed Leonie. "I thought you liked——"

"Your fiancé," murmured Ellery, "has just informed me that your pearls are nowhere in the pool, Miss Barrett."

Mrs. Nixon slapped Harkness's face, brought up her naked leg, set her foot against the man's wide chin, and shoved. Harkness laughed and went under.

"Swine," said Mrs. Nixon pleasantly, climbing out.

"It's your own fault," said Leonie. "I told you not to wear that bathing suit."

"Look," said the lieutenant darkly, "who's talking."

"If you *will* invite Tarzan for a weekend," began Mrs. Nixon, and she stopped. "What on earth are those men doing out there? They're crawling!"

Everybody looked. Ellery sighed. "I believe the general is tired of our company and is directing some sort of war game with his veterans.

Does he often get that way, Miss Barrett?"

"Infantry maneuvers," said the lieutenant quickly.

"That's a silly game," said Mrs. Nixon with spirit, taking off her cap. "What's on for this afternoon, Leonie? Let's do something exciting!"

"I think," said Harkness, clambering out of the pool like a great monkey, "I'd like to play an exciting game, Mrs. Nixon, if you're going to be in it." The sun gleamed on his wet torso.

"Animal," said Mrs. Nixon. "What shall it be? Suggest something, Mr. Queen."

"*I* don't know," said Ellery. "Treasure hunt? It's a little *passé* but at least it isn't too taxing on the brain."

"That," said Leonie, "has all the earmarks of a nasty crack. But I think it's a glorious idea. You arrange things, Mr. Queen."

"Treasure hunt?" Mrs. Nixon considered it. "Mm-m-m. Sounds nice. Make the treasure something worth while, won't you? I'm stony broke."

Ellery paused in the act of lighting a cigarette. Then he threw his match away. "If I'm elected—— When shall it be? After luncheon?" He grinned. "May as well do it brown. I'll fix the clues and things. Keep in the house, the lot of you. I don't want spying. Agreed?"

"We're in your hands," said Mrs. Nixon gayly.

"Lucky dog," sighed Harkness.

"See you later, then." Ellery strolled off toward the river. He heard Leonie's fresh voice exhorting her guests to hurry into the house to dress for luncheon.

Major General Barrett found Ellery at noon standing by the parapet and gazing absently at the opposite shore, half a mile away. The old gentleman's cheeks were bursting with blood and perspiration, and he looked angry and tired.

"Damn all thieves for black-hearted scoundrels!" he exploded, mopping his bald spot. Then he said inconsistently: "I'm beginning to think that Leonie mislaid it."

"You haven't found it?"

"No sign of it."

"Then where did she mislay it?"

"Oh, thunderation, I suppose you're right. I'm sick of the whole blasted business. To think that a guest under my roof——"

"Who said," sighed Ellery, "anything about a guest, general?"

The old gentleman glared. "Eh? What's that? What do you mean?"

"Nothing at all. You don't know. I don't know. Nobody but the thief knows. Shouldn't jump to conclusions, sir. Now, tell me. The search has been thorough?"

Major General Barrett groaned.

"You've gone through Magruder's cottage, too?"

"Certainly, certainly."

"The stables?"

"My dear sir——"

"The trees?"

"And the trees," snapped the general. "Every last place."

"Good! I——" Ellery began.

"What's good about it?"

Ellery looked astonished. "My dear general, it's superb! I'm prepared for it. In fact, I anticipated it. Because we're dealing with a very clever person."

"You know——" gasped the general.

"Very little concretely. But I see a glimmer. Now will you go back to the house, sir, and freshen up? You're fatigued and you'll need your energy for this afternoon. We're to play a game."

"Oh, heavens!" exclaimed the general and he trudged off toward the house, shaking his head.

Ellery watched him until he disappeared. Then he squatted on the parapet and gave himself over to thought.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," began Ellery after they had assembled on the veranda at two o'clock, "I have spent the last two hours hard at work—a personal sacrifice which I gladly contribute to the gayety of nations, and in return for which I ask only your lusty coöperation."

"Hear," said the general gloomily.

"Come, come, general, don't be antisocial. Of course, you all understand the game?" Ellery lighted a cigarette. "I have hidden the 'treasure' somewhere. I've left a trail to it—a winding trail, you understand, which you must follow step by step. At each step I've dropped a clue which, correctly interpreted, leads to the next step. The race is naturally to the swift. This game puts a premium on brains."

"That," said Mrs. Nixon ruefully. "lets me out." She was dressed in slacks, and she had bound her hair with a blue ribbon.

"Poor Dick," groaned Leonie. "I'm sure I shall have to pair up with him. He wouldn't get to first base by himself."

Fiske grinned, and Harkness drawled, "As long as we're splitting up I choose Mrs. Nixon. Looks as if you'll have to go it alone, general."

"Perhaps," said the general hopefully, "you young people would like to play by yourselves."

"By the way," said Ellery, "all the clues are in the form of quotations, you know."

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. Nixon. "You mean such things as 'First in war, first in peace'?"

"Ah, yes. Don't worry about the source. It's only the words themselves that concern you. Are you ready?"

"Wait a minute," said Harkness. "What's the treasure?"

Ellery threw his cigarette, which had gone out, into an ashtray. "Mustn't tell. Get set now! Let me quote you the first clue. It comes from the barbed quill of our old friend, Dean Swift, but disregard that. The quotation is"—he paused and they leaned forward eagerly—" 'First a fish should swim in the sea.' "

The general said, "Hrrumph! Damned silly," and settled in his chair.

Mrs. Nixon's amber eyes shone and she jumped up.

"Is *that* all?" she cried. "Goodness, that isn't the least bit difficult, Mr. Queen. Come on, Tarzan." She sped away over the lawns, followed by Harkness, who was grinning. They made for the parapet.

"Poor Dorothy," sighed Leonie. "She means well but she isn't exactly blessed with brains. She's taking the wrong tack, of course."

"You'd put her hard aport, I suppose?" murmured Ellery.

"*Mr.* Queen! You obviously didn't mean us to search the entire Hudson River. Consequently, it's a more restricted body of water you had in mind." She sprang off the veranda.

"The pool!" cried Lieutenant Fiske, scrambling after her.

"Remarkable woman, your daughter, sir," said Ellery, following the pair with his eyes. "I'm beginning to think Dick Fiske is an extraordinarily fortunate young man."

"Mother's brain," said the general, beaming suddenly. "I *am* interested." He waddled rapidly off the porch.

They found Leonie complacently deflating a large rubber fish which was still dripping from its immersion in the pool.

"Here it is," she said. "Come on, Dick, pay attention. What's this? 'Then it should swim in butter.' Butter, butter. Pantry, of course!" And she was off like the wind for the house, the lieutenant sprinting after.

Ellery replaced the note in the rubber fish, inflated it, stoppered the hole and tossed the thing back into the pool.

"The others will be here soon enough. There they are! I think they've caught on already. Come along, general."

Leonie was on her knees in the pantry before the huge refrigerator, digging a scrap of paper out of a butter-tub. "Goo," she said, wrinkling her nose. "Did you have to use butter? Read it, Dick. I'm filthy."

Lieutenant Fiske declaimed, "'And at last, sirrah, it should swim in good claret.'"

"Mr. Queen! I'm ashamed of you. This is too easy."

"It gets harder," said Ellery dryly, "as it goes along." He watched the young couple dash through the doorway to the cellar and then replaced the note in the tub. As he and the general closed the cellar door behind them they heard the clatter of Mrs. Nixon's feet in the pantry.

"Damned if Leonie hasn't forgotten all about that necklace of hers," muttered the general as they watched from the stairs. "Just like a woman!"

"I doubt very much if she has," murmured Ellery.

"Whee!" cried Leonie. "Here it is. What's this, Mr. Queen—Shakespeare?" She had pried a note from

between two dusty bottles in the wine cellar and was frowning over it.

"What's it say, Leonie?" asked Lieutenant Fiske.

"'Under the greenwood tree.' Greenwood tree." She replaced the note slowly. "It is getting harder. Have we any greenwood trees, father?"

The general replied wearily, "Blessed if I know. Never heard of 'em. You, Richard?"

The lieutenant looked dubious.

"All I know about the greenwood tree," said Leonie, "is that it's something in 'As You Like It' and a novel by Thomas Hardy. But ——"

"Come on, Tarzan!" shrieked Mrs. Nixon from above them. "They're still here. Out of the way, you two men! No fair setting up hazards."

Leonie scowled. Mrs. Nixon came flying down the cellar stairs followed by Harkness, who was still grinning, and snatched the note from the shelf. Her face fell. "Greek to me."

"Let me see it." Harkness scanned the note and laughed aloud. "Good boy, Queen," he chuckled. "*Chloros-plenium æruginosum.* You need a little botany in jungle work. I've seen that tree any number of times on the estate." He bounded up the stairs, grinned once more at Ellery and Major General Barrett and vanished.

"Damn!" said Leonie and she led the charge after Harkness.

When they came up with him the big man was leaning against the bark of an ancient and enormous shade tree, reading a scrap of paper and scratching his handsome chin. The bole of the tree was a vivid green which looked fungoid in origin.

"Green wood!" exclaimed Mrs. Nixon. "That *was* clever, Mr. Queen."

Leonie looked chagrined. "A man *would* take the honors. I'd never have thought it of you, Mr. Harkness. What's in the note?"

Harkness read aloud, "'And— seeks that which he lately threw away.'"

"Which who lately threw away?" complained the lieutenant. "That's ambiguous."

"Obviously," said Harkness, "the pronoun couldn't refer to the finder of the note. Queen couldn't possibly have known who would track it down. Consequently—— Of course!" And he sped off in the direction of the house.

"I don't like that man," said Leonie. "Dickie, haven't you any brains at all? And now we have to follow him again. I think you're mean, Mr. Queen."

"I leave it to you, general," said Ellery. "Did I want to play games?"

But they were all streaming after Harkness and Mrs. Nixon was in the van, her red hair flowing behind her like a pennon.

Ellery reached the veranda, the general puffing behind him, to find Harkness holding something aloft

out of reach of Mrs. Nixon's clutching fingers. "No, you don't. To the victor——"

"But how did you know, you nasty man?" cried Leonie.

Harkness lowered his arm. He was holding a half-consumed cigarette. "Stood to reason. The quotation had to refer to Queen himself. And the only thing I'd seen him 'lately' throw away was this cigarette butt just before we started." He took the cigarette apart. Imbedded in the tobacco near the tip was a tiny twist of paper. He smoothed it out and read its scribbled message.

Then he read it again, slowly.

"Well, for pity's sake!" snapped Mrs. Nixon. "Don't be a pig, Tarzan. If you don't know the answer give the rest of us a chance." She snatched the paper from him and read it. " 'Seeking—even in the cannon's mouth.' "

"Cannon's mouth?" cried the general. "Why——"

"Why, that's pie!" The red-haired woman giggled and ran.

She was seated defensively astride the sunset gun overlooking the river when they reached her. "This is a fine how-d'ye-do," she complained. "Cannon's mouth! How the devil can you look into the cannon's mouth when the cannon's mouth is situated in thin air seventy-five feet over the Hudson River? Pull this foul thing back a bit, lieutenant!"

Leonie was helpless with laughter. "You idiot! How do you think Magruder loads this gun—through the muzzle? There's a chamber in the back."

Lieutenant Fiske did something expertly to the mechanism at the rear of the sunset gun, and in a twinkling had swung back the safe-like little door of the breech block and revealed a round orifice. He thrust his hand in, and his jaw dropped. "It's the treasure!" he shouted. "By George, Dorothy, you've won!"

Mrs. Nixon slid off the cannon, gurgling, "Gimme, gimme!" like an excited gamine. She bumped him rudely aside and pulled out a wad of oily cotton batting.

"What is it?" cried Leonie.

"I—— Why, Leonie, you darling!" Mrs. Nixon's face fell. "I knew it was too good to be true. *Treasure!* I should say so."

"My pearls!" screamed Leonie. She snatched the rope of snowy gems from Mrs. Nixon, hugging them to her bosom. And then she turned to Ellery with the oddest look of inquiry.

"Well, I'll be—be blasted," said the general feebly. "Did *you* take 'em, Queen?"

"Not exactly," said Ellery. "Stand still, please. That means everybody. We have Mrs. Nixon and Mr. Harkness possibly at a disadvantage. You see, Miss Barrett's pearls were stolen this morning."

"Stolen?" Harkness lifted an eyebrow.

"Stolen!" gasped Mrs. Nixon. "So that's why——"

"Yes," said Ellery. "Now, perceive. Some one filches a valuable necklace. Problem—to get it away. Was the necklace still on the premises? It was. It had to be. There are only two physical means of egress from the estate—by the cliff road yonder, at the entrance to which is Magruder's cottage, and by the river below. Everywhere else there are perpendicular cliffs impossible to climb. And their crests are so high that it was scarcely feasible for an accomplice, say, to let a rope down and haul the loot up.

"Now, since before six, Magruder had the land exit under observation and Braun the river exit. Neither had seen a soul and Braun said that nothing had been thrown over the parapet to the beach or water or he would have heard the impact or splash. Since the thief had made no attempt to dispose of the pearls by the only two possible routes it was clear then that the pearls were still on the estate."

Leonie's face was pinched and pale now and she kept her eyes steadfastly on Ellery. The general looked embarrassed.

"But the thief," said Ellery, "must have had a plan of disposal, a plan that would circumvent all normal contingencies. Knowing that the theft might be discovered at once, he would expect an early arrival of the police and plan accordingly. People don't take the loss of a twenty-five-thousand-dollar necklace without a fight.

"If he expected a search, he could not have planned to hide his loot in an obvious place—such as on his person, in his luggage, in the house or in the usual places on the estate. Of course he might have meant to dig a hole somewhere and bury the pearls. But I didn't think so because he would in that case still have the problem of disposal with the estate guarded.

"As a matter of fact I myself searched every inch of the house and the general's servants searched every inch of the grounds and outbuildings—just to make sure. We called no police but acted as police ourselves. And the pearls weren't found."

"But——" began Lieutenant Fiske in a puzzled way.

"Please, lieutenant. It was plain then that the thief, whatever his plan, had discarded any normal use of either the land or water route—as a means of getting the pearls off the estate. Had he intended to walk off with them himself or mail them to an accomplice? Hardly if he anticipated a police investigation and surveillance.

"Besides, remember that he deliberately planned and committed his theft with the foreknowledge that a detective was in the house. And while I lay no claim to exceptional formidability you must admit it took a daring, clever thief to concoct and carry out a theft under the circumstances. I felt justified in assuming that, whatever his plan was, it was itself daring

and clever—not stupid and commonplace.

"But if he had discarded the normal means of disposal he must have had in mind an extraordinary means, still using one of the only two possible routes. And then I recalled that there was one way the river route could be utilized to that end which was so innocent in appearance that it would probably be successful even if a whole regiment of infantry were on guard. And I knew that must be the answer."

"The sunset gun," said Leonie in a low voice.

"Precisely, Miss Barrett, the sunset gun. By preparing a package with the pearls inside, opening the breech block of the gun and thrusting the package into the chamber and walking away, he disposed very simply of the bothersome problem of getting the pearls away. You see, anyone with a knowledge of ordnance and ballistics would know that this gun, like all guns which fire salutes, uses 'blank' ammunition. That is, there is no explosive shell—merely a charge of powder which goes off with a loud noise and a burst of smoke.

"Now while this powder is a noisemaker purely, it still possesses a certain propulsive power—not much but enough for the thief's purposes. Consequently Magruder would come along at sundown today, slip the blank into the breech, pull the firing cord and—*boom!* Away go the pearls in a puff of concealing smoke, to be hurled the scant twenty feet or so necessary to make it clear the little beach below and fall into the water."

"But how——" spluttered the general, red as a cherry.

"Obviously the container would have to float. Aluminum, probably, or something equally strong yet light. Then an accomplice must be in the scheme—some one to idle along in the Hudson below in a boat at sunset, pick up the container and cheerfully sail away. At that time Braun is not on duty as he told me. But even if he were I doubt that he would have noticed anything in the noise and smoke of the gun."

"Accomplice, eh?" roared the general. "I'll phone——"

Ellery sighed. "Already done, general. I telephoned the local police at one o'clock to be on the lookout. Our man will be waiting at sundown and if you stick to schedule with your salute to the dying sun they'll nab him red-handed."

"But where's this container, or can?" asked the lieutenant.

"Oh, safely hidden away," said Ellery dryly. "Very safely."

"You hid it? But why?"

Ellery smoked peacefully for a moment. "You know, there's a fat-bellied little god who watches over such as me. Last night we played a murder game. To make it realistic and to illustrate a point I took everyone's fingerprints with the aid of that handy little kit I carry about. I neglected to destroy the exhibits.

"This afternoon, before our treasure hunt, I found the container in the gun here. Naturally, having reasoned out the hiding place, I went straight to it for confirmation. And what do you think I found on the can? Fingerprints!"

Ellery grimaced. "Disappointing, isn't it? But then our clever thief was so sure of himself he never dreamed anyone would uncover his cache before the gun was fired. And so he was careless. It was child's play of course to compare the prints on the can with the master sets from last night's game." He paused. "Well?" he said.

There was silence for as long as one can hold a breath and in the silence they heard the flapping of the flag overhead.

Then, his hands unclenching, Harkness said lightly, "You've got me, pal."

"Ah," said Ellery. "So good of you, Mr. Harkness."

They stood about the gun at sunset. Old Magruder yanked the cord, and the gun roared as the flag came down, and Major General Barrett and Lieutenant Fiske stood rigidly at attention. The report echoed and reëchoed, filling the air with hollow thunder.

"Look at the creature," murmured Mrs. Nixon a moment later, leaning over the parapet and staring down. "He looks like a bug running around in circles."

They joined her silently. The Hudson below was a steel mirror reflecting the last copper rays of the sun. Except for a small boat with an outboard motor the river was denuded of craft. The man was hurling his boat this way and that, scanning the surface of the river anxiously. Suddenly he looked up and saw the faces watching him and with ludicrous haste frantically swept his boat about and shot it for the opposite shore.

"I still don't understand," complained Mrs. Nixon, "why you called the law off that person, Mr. Queen. He's a criminal, isn't he?"

Ellery sighed. "Only in intent. And then it was Miss Barrett's idea, not mine. I can't say I'm sorry. While I hold no brief for Harkness and his accomplice, who's probably some poor devil seduced by our dashing friend into doing the work of disposal, I'm rather relieved Miss Barrett hasn't been properly vindictive.

"Harkness has been touched and spoiled by the life he leads. It's really not his fault. When you spend half your life in jungles, the civilized moralities lose their edge. He needed the money and so he took the pearls."

"He's punished enough," said Leonie gently. "Almost as much as if we'd turned him over to the police instead of sending him packing. He's through socially. And since I have my pearls back——"

"Interesting problem," murmured Ellery dreamily. "I suppose you all saw the significance of the treasure hunt?"

Lieutenant Fiske looked blank. "I guess I'm thick. I don't."

"Pshaw! At the time I suggested the game I had no ulterior motive. But when the reports came in and I deduced that the pearls were in the sunset gun I saw a way to use the game to trap the thief."

He smiled at Leonie, who grinned back. "Miss Barrett was my accomplice. I asked her privately to start brilliantly—in order to lull suspicion—and slow up as she went along. The mere use of the gun had made me suspect Harkness, who knows guns. I wanted to test him.

"Well, Harkness came through. As Miss Barrett slowed up, he forged ahead and he displayed cleverness in detecting the clew of the greenwood tree. He displayed acute observation in spotting the clew of the cigarette. Two rather difficult clews, mind you.

"Then, at the easiest of all, he became puzzled! He didn't 'know' what was meant by the cannon's mouth! Even Mrs. Nixon—forgive me—spotted that one. Why had Harkness been reluctant to go to the gun? It could only have been because he knew what was in it."

"But it all seems so unnecessary," objected the lieutenant. "If you had the fingerprints the case was solved. Why the rigmarole?"

Ellery flipped his butt over the parapet. "My boy," he said, "have you ever played poker?"

"Of course, I have."

Leonie cried, "You fox! Don't tell me——"

"Bluff," said Ellery sadly. "Sheer bluff. There *weren't* any fingerprints on the container."

When a big-city detective is pressed into service as an emergency midwife, the story usually rates a couple of paragraphs on an inside page. Miss Pulitzer thought she was giving Detective-Midwife Kilbane a break when she ran the item in her column. What she didn't know was that the midwifery was tied up with a deadly gang murder—and the resulting foul-up makes for stirring reading as Thomas Walsh reveals in our next issue with A NAME FOR BABY. A story of a professional cop on a hot spot.

and so died riabouchinska

by . . . Ray Bradbury

The puppet was beautiful as a snowflake. Yet within her body lay locked her creator's fate.

THE CELLAR WAS COLD cement and the dead man was cold stone and the air was filled with an invisible fall of rain, while the people gathered to look at the body as if it had been washed in on an empty shore at morning. The gravity of the earth was drawn to a focus here in this single basement room—a gravity so immense that it pulled their faces down, bent their mouths at the corners and drained their cheeks. Their hands hung weighted and their feet were planted so they could not move without seeming to walk under water.

A voice was calling but nobody listened.

The voice called again and only after a long time did the people turn and look, momentarily, into the air. They were at the seashore in November and this was a gull crying over their heads in the grey color of dawn. It was a sad crying, like the birds going south for the steel winter to come. It was an ocean sounding the shore so far away that it was only a whisper of sand and wind in a seashell.

The people in the basement room shifted their gaze to a table and a golden box resting there, no more

Mr. Bradbury is rightly famed as one of America's most brilliant and successful young authors of fantasy and science fiction. However, this young Californian is far more than a dealer in Martians and vampires and space ships. For pace by pace with the development of the fantasy writer has grown a creator of some of the finest mystery and terror fiction of recent years. This story is his newest, perhaps his most horrifying.

than twenty-four inches long, inscribed with the name RIA-BOUCHINSKA. Under the lid of this small coffin the voice at last settled with finality and the people stared at the box and the dead man lay on the floor, not hearing the soft cry.

"Let me out, let me out, oh please please someone let me out."

And finally Mr. Fabian, the ventriloquist, bent and whispered to the golden box, "No, Ria, this is serious business. Later. Be quiet now, that's a good girl." He shut his eyes and tried to laugh.

From under the polished lid her calm voice said, "Please don't laugh. You should be much kinder now after what's happened."

Detective Lieutenant Krovitch touched Fabian's arm. "If you don't mind we'll save your dummy act for later. Right now there's all *this* to clean up." He glanced at the woman, who had now taken a folding chair. "Mrs. Fabian." He nodded to the young man sitting next to her. "Mr. Douglas, you're Mr. Fabian's press-agent and manager?"

The young man said he was. Krovitch looked at the face of the man on the floor. "Fabian, Mrs. Fabian, Mr. Douglas—all of you say you don't know this man who was murdered here last night, never heard the name Ockham before. Yet Ockham earlier told the stage manager he knew Fabian and had to see him about something vitally important."

The voice in the box began again quietly.

Krovitch shouted. "*Damn* it, Fabian!"

Under the lid, the voice laughed. It was like a muffled bell, ringing.

"Pay no attention to her, lieutenant," said Fabian.

"Her? Or *you*, damn it! What is this? Get together, you two!"

"We'll never be together," said the quiet voice, "never again after tonight."

Krovitch put out his hand. "Give me the key, Fabian."

In the silence there was the rattle of the key in the small lock, the squeal of the miniature hinges as the lid was opened and laid back against the table-top.

"Thank you," said Riabouchinska.

Krovitch stood motionless, just looking down and seeing Riabouchinska in her box and not quite believing what he saw.

The face was white and it was cut from marble or from the whitest wood he had ever seen. It might have been cut from snow. And the neck that held the head which was as dainty as a porcelain cup with the sun shining through the thinness of it, the neck was also white. And the hands could have been ivory and they were thin small things with tiny fingernails and whorls on the pads of the fingers, little delicate spirals and lines.

She was all white stone, with light pouring through the stone and light coming out of the dark eyes, with blue tones beneath like fresh

mulberries. He was reminded of milk-glass and cream poured in a crystal tumbler. The brows were arched and black and thin and the cheeks were hollowed and there was a faint pink vein in each temple and a faint blue vein barely visible above the slender bridge of the nose, between the shining dark eyes.

Her lips were half-parted and it looked as if they might be slightly damp and the nostrils were arched and modeled perfectly as were the ears. The hair was black and it was parted in the middle and drawn back of the ears and it was real—he could see every single strand of hair. Her gown was as black as her hair and draped in such a fashion as to show her shoulders, which were carved wood as white as a stone that has lain a long time in the sun. She was very beautiful. Krovitch felt his throat move and then he stopped and did not say anything.

Fabian took Riabouchinska from her box. "My lovely lady," he said. "Carved from the rarest imported woods. She's appeared in Paris, Rome, Istanbul. Everyone in the world loves her and thinks she's really human, some sort of incredibly delicate midget-creature. They won't accept that she was once part of many forests growing far away from cities and idiotic people."

Fabian's wife, Alyce, watched her husband, not taking her eyes from his mouth. Her eyes did not blink once in all the time he was telling of the doll he held in his arms. He in turn seemed aware of no one but the doll—the cellar and its people were lost in a mist that settled everywhere.

But finally the small figure stirred and quivered. "Please, don't talk about me! You know Alyce doesn't like it."

"Alyce never *has* liked it."

"Shh, don't!" cried Riabouchinska. "Not here, not now." And then, swiftly, she turned to Krovitch and her tiny lips moved. "How did it all happen? Mr. Ockham, I mean, Mr. Ockham."

Fabian said, "You'd better go to sleep now, Ria . . ."

"But I don't *want* to," she replied. "I've as much right to listen and talk, I'm as much a part of this murder as Alyce or—or Mr. Douglas even!"

The press-agent threw down his cigarette. "Don't drag me into this, you—" And he looked at the doll as if it had suddenly become six feet tall and was breathing there before him.

"It's just that I want the truth to be told." Riabouchinska turned her head to see all of the room. "And if I'm locked in my coffin there'll be no truth, for John's a consummate liar and I must watch after him, isn't that right, John?"

"Yes," he said, his eyes shut, "I suppose it is."

"John loves me best of all the women in the world and I love him and try to understand his wrong way of thinking."

Krovitch hit the table with his fist. "God damn, oh God *damn* it! Fabian! If you think you can—"

"I'm helpless," said Fabian.

"But she's—"

"I know, I know what you want to say," said Fabian quietly, looking at the detective. "She's in my throat, is that it? No, no. She's not in my throat. She's somewhere else. I don't know. Here, or here." He touched his chest, his head.

"She's quick to hide. Sometimes there's nothing I can do. Sometimes she is only herself, nothing of me at all. Sometimes she tells me what to do and I must do it. She stands guard, she reprimands me, is honest where I am dishonest, good when I am wicked as all the sins that ever were. She lives a life apart.

"She's raised a wall in my head and lives there, ignoring me if I try to make her say improper things, cooperating if I suggest the right words and pantomime." Fabian sighed. "So, if you intend going on I'm afraid Ria must be present. Locking her up will do no good, no good at all."

Lieutenant Krovitch sat silently for the better part of a minute, then made his decision. "All right. Let her stay. It just may be, by God, that before the night's over I'll be tired enough to ask even a ventriloquist's dummy questions."

Krovitch unwrapped a fresh cigar, lit it, and puffed smoke. "So you don't recognize the dead man, Mr. Douglas?"

"He looks vaguely familiar. Could be an actor."

Krovitch swore. "Let's all stop lying, what do you say? Look at Ockham's shoes, his clothing. It's obvious he needed money and came here tonight to beg, borrow or steal some. Let me ask you this, Douglas—are you in love with Mrs. Fabian?"

"Now wait just a moment!" cried Alyce Fabian.

Krovitch motioned her down. "You sit there, side by side, the two of you. I'm not exactly blind. When a press-agent sits where the husband should be sitting, consoling the wife, *well!* The way you look at the marionette's coffin, Mrs. Fabian, holding your breath when she appears. You make fists when she talks. Hell, you're obvious."

"If you think for one moment I'm jealous of a stick of wood!"

"*Aren't* you?"

"No, no, I'm *not!*"

Fabian moved. "You needn't tell him anything, Alyce."

"*Let* her!"

They all jerked their heads and stared at the small figurine whose mouth was now slowly shutting. Even Fabian looked at the marionette as if it had struck him a blow.

After a long while Alyce Fabian began to speak.

"I married John seven years ago because he said he loved me and because I loved him and I loved Riabouchinska. At first anyway. But then I began to see that he really lived all of his life and paid

most of his attentions to her and I was a shadow waiting in the wings every night.

"He spent fifty thousand dollars a year on her wardrobes—one hundred thousand dollars for a doll house with gold and silver and platinum furniture. He tucked her in a small satin bed each night and talked to her. I thought it was all an elaborate joke at first and I was wonderfully amused.

"But when it finally came to me that I was indeed merely an assistant in his act I began to feel a vague sort of hatred and distrust, not for the marionette, because after all it wasn't her doing—but I felt a terrible growing dislike and hatred for John, because it *was* his fault. He, after all, was the control and all of his cleverness and natural sadism came out through his relationship with the wooden doll.

"And when I finally became very jealous, how silly of me! It was the greatest tribute I could have paid him and the way he had gone about perfecting the art of throwing his voice. It was all so idiotic, it was all so strange. And yet I knew that something had hold of John, just as people who drink have a hungry animal somewhere in them, starving to death.

"So I moved back and forth from anger to pity, from jealousy to understanding. There were long periods when I didn't hate him at all and I never hated the thing that Ria was in him, for she was the best half, the good part, the honest and the lovely part of him. She was everything that he never let himself try to be."

Alyce Fabian stopped talking and the basement room was silent.

"Tell about Mr. Douglas," said a voice, whispering.

Mrs. Fabian did not look up at the marionette. With an effort she finished it out. "When the years passed and there was so little love and understanding from John I guess it was natural I turned to—Mr. Douglas."

Krovitch nodded. "Everything begins to fall into place. Mr. Ockham was a very poor man, down on his luck, and he came to this theatre tonight because he knew something about you and Mr. Douglas. Perhaps he threatened to speak to Mr. Fabian if you didn't buy him off. That would give you the best of reasons to get rid of him."

"That's even sillier than all the rest," said Alyce Fabian, tiredly. "I didn't kill him."

"Mr. Douglas might have and not told you."

"Why kill a man?" said Douglas. "John knew all about us."

"I did indeed," said John Fabian and laughed.

He stopped laughing and his hand twitched, hidden in the snowflake interior of the tiny doll, and her mouth opened and shut, opened and shut—he was trying to make her carry the laughter on after he had stopped—but there was no

sound, save the little empty whisper of her lips moving and gasping, while Fabian stared down at the little face and perspiration came out, shining, upon his cheeks.

The next afternoon Lieutenant Krovitch moved through the theatre darkness backstage, found the iron stairs and climbed with great thought, taking as much time as he deemed necessary on each step, up to the second-level dressing rooms. He rapped on one of the thin-paneled doors.

"Come in," said Fabian's voice from what seemed a great distance.

Krovitch entered and closed the door and stood looking at the man who was slumped before his dressing mirror. "I have something I'd like to show you," he said at last. His face showing no emotion whatever Krovitch opened a manila folder and pulled out a glossy photograph which he placed on the dressing-table.

John Fabian raised his eyebrows, glanced quickly up at Krovitch and then settled slowly back in his chair. He put his fingers to the bridge of his nose and massaged his face carefully as if he had a headache. Krovitch turned the picture over and began to read from the typewritten data on the back.

"Name, Miss Ilyana Riamonova. One hundred pounds. Blue eyes. Black hair. Oval face. Born nineteen hundred and fourteen, New York City. Disappeared nineteen hundred and thirty-four. Believed a victim of amnesia. Of Russo-Slav parentage. Et cetera. Et cetera."

Fabian's lips twitched.

Krovitch laid the photograph down, shaking his head thoughtfully. "It was pretty silly of me to go through police files for a picture of a marionette. You should have heard the laughter at headquarters. *God.* Still—here she *is*—Riabouchinska. *Not* papier-maché, *not* wood, *not* a puppet, but a woman who once lived and moved around and —disappeared." He looked steadily at Fabian. "Suppose you take it from there?"

Fabian half-smiled. "There's nothing to it at all. I saw this woman's picture a long time ago, liked her looks and copied my marionette after her."

"Nothing to it at all." Krovitch took a deep breath and exhaled, wiping his face with a huge handkerchief. "Fabian, this very morning I shuffled through a stack of BILLBOARD Magazines *that* high. In the year nineteen hundred and thirty-four I found an interesting article concerning an act which played on a second-rate circuit, known as Fabian and Sweet William. Sweet William was a little boy dummy.

"There was a girl assistant—Ilyana Riamonova. No picture of her in the article but I at least had a *name,* the name of a *real* person, to go on. It was simple to check police files then and dig up this picture. The resemblance, needless to say, between the live woman on one

hand and the puppet on the other is nothing short of incredible. Suppose you go back and tell your story over again, Fabian?"

"She was my assistant, that's all. I simply used her as a model."

"You're making me sweat," said the detective. "Do you think I'm a fool? Do you think I don't know love when I see it? I've watched you handle the marionette, I've seen you talk to it, I've seen how you make it react to you. You're in love with the puppet naturally, because you loved the original woman very *very* much. I've lived too long not to sense that. Hell, Fabian, stop fencing around."

Fabian lifted his pale slender hands, turned them over, examined them and let them fall.

"All right. In nineteen hundred and thirty-four I was billed as Fabian and Sweet William. Sweet William was a small bulb-nosed boy dummy I carved a long time ago. I was in Los Angeles when this girl appeared at the stage door one night. She'd followed my work for years. She was desperate for a job and she hoped to be my assistant . . ."

He remembered her in the half-light of the alley behind the theatre and how startled he was at her freshness and eagerness to work with and for him and the way the cool rain touched softly down through the narrow alleyway and caught in small spangles through her hair, melting in dark warmness, and the rain beaded upon her white porcelain hand holding her coat together at her neck.

He saw her lips motion in the dark and her voice, separated off on another sound-track it seemed, speaking to him in the autumn wind, and he remembered that without saying yes or no or perhaps, she was suddenly on the stage with him, in the great pouring bright light, and in two months he, who had always prided himself on his cynicism and disbelief, had stepped off the rim of the world after her, plunging down a bottomless place of no limit and no light anywhere.

Arguments followed and more than arguments—things said and done that lacked all sense and sanity and fairness. She had edged away from him at last, causing his rages and remarkable hysterias. Once he burned her entire wardrobe in a fit of jealousy. She had taken this quietly. But then one night he handed her a week's notice, accused her of monstrous disloyalty, shouted at her, seized her, slapped her again and again across the face, bullied her about and thrust her out the door, slamming it!

She disappeared that night.

When he found the next day that she was really gone and there was nowhere to find her, it was like standing in the center of a titanic explosion. All the world was smashed flat and all the echoes of the explosion came back to reverberate at midnight, at four in the morning, at dawn, and he was up

early, stunned, with the sound of coffee simmering and the sound of matches being struck and cigarettes lit and himself trying to shave and looking at mirrors that were sickening in their distortion.

He clipped out all the advertisements that he took in the papers and pasted them in neat rows in a scrapbook—all the ads describing her and telling about her and asking for her back. He even put a private detective on the case. People talked. The police dropped by to question him. There was more talk.

But she was gone like a piece of white incredibly fragile tissue-paper, blown over the sky and down. A record of her was sent to the largest cities, and that was the end of it for the police. But not for Fabian. She might be dead or just running away but wherever she was he knew that somehow and in some way he would have her back.

One night he came home, bringing his own darkness with him, and collapsed upon a chair and before he knew it, he found himself speaking to Sweet William, in the totally black room.

"William, it's all over and done. I *can't* keep it up!"

And William cried, "Coward! Coward!" from the air above his head, out of the emptiness. "You can get her back if you want!"

"No I can't. No I can never get her back."

Sweet William squeaked and clappered at him in the night. "Yes, you can! *Think!*" he insisted. "Think of a way. You can do it. Put me aside, lock me up. Start all over."

"Start all over?"

"Yes," whispered Sweet William and darkness moved within darkness. "Yes. Buy wood. Buy fine new wood. Buy hard-grained wood. Buy beautiful fresh new wood. And carve. Carce slowly and carve carefully. Whittle away. Cut delicately. Make the little nostrils, so. And cut her thin black eyebrows, round and high, *so*, and make her cheeks in small hollows. Carve, carve . . ."

"No! It's foolish. I could *never* do it!"

"Yes you could. Yes you could, could, could, could . . ."

The voice faded, a ripple of water in an underground stream. The stream rose up and swallowed him. His head fell forward. Sweet William sighed. And then the two of them lay like stones buried under a waterfall.

The next morning, John Fabian bought the hardest finest-grained piece of wood that he could find and brought it home and laid it on the table but could not touch it. He sat for hours staring at it. It was impossible to think that out of this cold chunk of material he expected his hands and his memory to recreate something warm and pliable and familiar. There was no way even faintly to approximate that quality of rain and summer and the first powderings of snow upon a clear pane of glass in the middle of a December night. No way, no

way at all to catch the snowflake without having it melt swiftly away in your clumsy fingers.

And yet, Sweet William spoke out, sighing and whispering, after midnight, "You can do it. Oh, yes, yes, you can do it!"

And so he began. It took him an entire month to carve her hands into things as natural and beautiful as shells lying in the sun. Another month and the skeleton, like a fossil imprint he was searching out, stamped and hidden in the wood, was revealed, all febrile and so infinitely delicate as to suggest the veins in the white flesh of an apple.

And all the while Sweet William lay mantled in dust in his box that was fast becoming a very real coffin. Sweet William croaking and wheezing some feeble sarcasm, some sour criticism, some hint, some help —but dying all the time, fading, soon to be untouched, soon to be like a sheathe moulted in summer and left behind to blow in the wind.

As the weeks passed and Fabian moulded and scraped and polished the new wood, Sweet William lay longer and longer in stricken silence and one day as Fabian held the puppet in his hand Sweet William seemed to look at him a moment with puzzled eyes and then there was a death rattle in his throat.

And Sweet William was gone.

Now as he worked a fluttering, a faint motion of speech began far back in his throat, echoing and re-echoing, speaking silently like a breeze among dry leaves. And then for the first time he held the doll in a certain way in his hands and memory moved down his arms and into his fingers and from his fingers into the hollowed wood and the tiny hands flickered and the body became suddenly soft and pliable and her eyes opened and looked up at him.

And the small mouth opened the merest fraction of an inch and she was ready to speak and he knew all of the things that she must say to him, he knew the first and the second and the third things he would have her say. There was a whisper, a whisper, a whisper.

The tiny head turned this way gently, that way gently. The mouth half-opened again and began to speak. And as it spoke he bent his head and he could feel the warm breath—of *course* it was there!—coming from her mouth and when he listened very carefully, holding her to his head, his eyes shut, wasn't *it* there, too? softly, *gently?* the beating of her heart.

Krovitch sat in a chair for a full minute after Fabian stopped talking. Finally he said, "I see. And your wife?"

"Alyce? She was my second assistant, of course. She worked very hard and, God help her, she loved me. It's hard now to know why I ever married her. It was unfair of me."

"What about the dead man—Ockham?"

"I never saw him before you showed me his body in the theatre basement yesterday."

"Fabian," said the detective.

"It's the truth!"

"Fabian."

"The truth, the truth, damn it, I swear it's the truth!"

"The truth." There was a whisper like the sea coming in on the grey shore at early morning. The birds were flying south and always south. The water was ebbing in a fine lace on the sand. The sky was cold and empty. There were no people on the shore. The sun was gone. And the whisper said again, "The truth."

Fabian sat up straight and took hold of his knees with his thin hands. His face was rigid. Krovitch found himself making the same motion he had made the day before —looking at the grey ceiling as if it were a November sky and a lonely bird going over and away, grey within the cold greyness.

"The truth." Fading. "The truth."

Krovitch lifted himself and moved as carefully as he could to the far side of the dressing room where the golden box lay open and inside of the box the thing that whispered and talked and could laugh sometimes and could sometimes sing. He carried the golden box over and set it down in front of Fabian and waited for him to put his living hand within the gloved delicate hollowness, waited for the fine small mouth to quiver and the eyes to focus. He did not have to wait long.

"The first letter came a month ago."

"No."

"The first letter came a month ago."

"No, *no!*"

"The letter said, '*RIABOUCHINSKA, Born nineteen hundred and fourteen—Died nineteen hundred and thirty-four. Born again in nineteen hundred and thirty-five.*' Mr. Ockham was a juggler. He'd been on the same bill with John and Sweet William years before. He remembered that once there had been a woman *before* there was a puppet."

"No, that's not true!"

"Yes," said the voice.

Snow was falling in silences and even deeper silences through the dressing room. Fabian's mouth trembled. He stared at the blank walls as if seeking some new door by which to escape. He half rose from his chair. "Please . . ."

"Ockham threatened to tell about us to everyone in the world."

"No, please . . ." The voice stopped.

Fabian looked down at the carved white face and nodded slowly. He swallowed and took a breath. He looked at the detective. "I wanted my life to myself. What sort of future would there be if everyone guessed the reason for my carving a doll that talked and moved and was so beautiful?

"People would laugh. People

would turn away. 'Ugly,' they'd say. 'Horrible! *Look* at them on the stage!' they'd whisper. 'Listen to them quoting Romeo and Juliet, oh God—*No!* Look, look at those terrible people on the stage! Hideous!' they'd whisper. 'She lived once, you know,' they'd whisper. 'She disappeared. They say he *killed* her. They say he *loved* her!' "

Krovitch spoke quietly. "How much did Ockham want?"

"A thousand dollars to start. More later."

"And so you killed him."

"No I didn't. I paid him off!"

"We found no money on him."

"I paid him! Alyce and Douglas must have heard us talking. They've wanted to be rid of me for years now. I'm not blind! Alyce saw a way of ridding herself of me, satisfying her jealousy and getting some money, too. It's all *very* clear!"

"No."

A single drop of clear water falling down into the cool surface of a well.

"No . . ."

A single harp-thread, touched, breathed upon.

"There's something I must say. And yet," she whispered, "I can't say it . . ."

Krovitch saw the doll quiver, saw the fluttering of the lips, saw Fabian's eyes widen and fix and his throat convulse and tighten as if to stop the whispering.

"I—I was in the room when Mr. Ockham came. I lay in my box and I listened and I heard, and I *know.*" The voice blurred, then recovered and went on. "Mr. Ockham threatened to tear me up, burn me into ashes if John didn't pay him a thousand dollars. Then suddenly there was a falling sound! A cry! Mr. Ockham's head must have struck the floor! I heard John cry out and I heard him swearing, I heard him sobbing. I heard a gasping and a choking sound."

"You heard nothing! You're deaf, you're blind! You're *wood!*" cried Fabian.

"But I *hear!*" she said, and stopped as if someone had put a hand to her mouth.

Fabian had leapt to his feet now and stood with the doll in his hand. The mouth clapped twice, three times, then finally made words. "The choking sound stopped. I heard John drag Mr. Ockham down the stairs under the theatre to the old dressing rooms that haven't been used in years. Down, down, down I heard them going away and away—down . . ."

Krovitch stepped back as if he were watching a motion picture that had suddenly grown monstrously tall. The figures terrified and frightened him, they were immense, they *towered!* They threatened to inundate him with size. Someone had turned up the sound so that it screamed.

Everything was white and bloodless, everything swayed and toppled, the avalanche trembled on the the brink, ready to drop in thunders

of shale and flint and marble and cutting ice. He saw Fabian's teeth, a grimace, a whisper, a clenching. He saw the man's eyes squeeze shut.

Now the soft voice was so high and faint it was like the last flake of snow moving toward the warm earth that in a moment would melt it away to nothingness.

"I'm not made to live this way. This way. There's nothing for us now. Everyone will know, everyone will. Even when you killed him and I lay asleep last night I dreamed. I knew, I realised. We both knew, we *both* realised that these would be our last days, our last hours. Because while I've lived with weakness and I've lived with your lies, I can't live with something that kills and hurts in killing. There's no way to go on from here. How *can* I live alongside such knowledge . . ."

Fabian held her into the sunlight which shone dimly through the small dressing-room window. She looked at him and there was nothing in her eyes. His hand shook and in shaking made the marionette tremble too. Her mouth closed and opened, closed and opened, closed and opened, again and again and again—Silence.

The snowflakes touched the earth and melted.

Fabian moved his fingers unbelievingly to his own mouth. A film slid across his eyes. He looked like a man lost in the street, trying to remember the number of a certain house, trying to find a certain window with a certain light. He swayed about, staring at the walls, at Krovitch, at the doll, at his free hand, turning the fingers over, touching his throat, opening his mouth. He listened.

Miles away in a cave, a single wave came in from the sea and whispered down in foam. A gull moved soundlessly, not beating its wings—a shadow.

"She's gone. She's gone. I can't find her. She's run off. I can't find her. I can't find her. I try, I try, but she's run away off far. Will you help me? Will you help me find her? Will you help me find her? Will you please help me find her?"

Riabouchinska slipped bonelessly from his limp hand, folded over and glided noiselessly down to lie upon the cold floor, her eyes closed, her mouth shut.

Fabian did not look at her as Krovitch led him toward the door.

It is a fact little known to the mystery-reading public that Ricky Webb, senior half of the Webb-Wheeler combine that has for many years produced brilliant detective fiction under the name of Q. Patrick (to say nothing of Patrick Quentin and Jonathan Stagg), is also the inventor of the benzedrine inhaler. A goodly proportion of those aware of Webb's non-writing talent feel strongly that he would have been more in character if he had invented the oxygen inhaler instead. Those who read Q. Patrick's THE HATED WOMAN in the next TSDM should agree with them.

the question mark

by . . . Octavus Roy Cohen

Can circumstances justify any man in becoming executioner to a fellow, no matter how vile? McBride thought yes but the law had other ideas about killing even a rat.

IN ONE HAND WALTER MCBRIDE held a 38-caliber revolver—in the other five cartridges. He placed the cartridges on the table, spun the cylinder of the revolver and pulled the trigger five times on the empty chambers. Five sharp metallic clicks rewarded his efforts.

McBride was mildly amazed at his freedom from emotion in view of the fact that within an hour he planned to take a human life. Two or three times in the past he had permitted his imagination to amuse him with speculation regarding his reactions should need for homicide ever arise. Until this stern moment he had firmly believed that his nerves would be jumpy, his heart action uneven, himself thoroughly frightened.

Now, however, he found himself experiencing no particular internal processes, his brain normally receptive to impressions. Perhaps, he reflected, this condition was fathered by the fact that the homicide he proposed to commit was ethically justifiable.

Walter McBride did not plan to do murder. He realised, of course, that a jury, reviewing the facts some months later, might decide he had exceeded his authority as a citizen and a gentleman by ridding

Trying to say something about Octavus Roy Cohen is a little like trying to say something about baseball or the Fourth of July—for he has become, over the years, almost as well-known and beloved an American institution. So—well, here he is in top form.

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the earth of a person whose existence he knew to be a positive detriment to the community—but at the moment McBride was not weighing consequences. Circumstances—and a rigid code of decency—had forced upon him the extremely distasteful role of executioner and he completed his preparations with scrupulous attention to detail.

He replaced in the bathroom medicine-cabinet the small bottle of machine oil he had used in cleaning the revolver, threw into the waste-basket the piece of flannel which had been employed in the same task. He broke the weapon, slipped the freshly-greased cartridges into their chambers, snapped the catch again, held the thing in his palm and regarded it speculatively before slipping it unemotionally into his hip pocket.

Then he donned hat and overcoat, stepped from his apartment into the elevator, thence into the street, where he elected to walk the twelve blocks which separated his apartment house from that of the man whom he was about to kill.

The little old man at the corner newsstand greeted McBride cheerily and received a smile and a nod in answer. And the little old man gazed rather affectionately after the trim well-tailored figure, never dreaming that the young man was doing anything more than indulging in an afternoon walk.

Certainly there was nothing in the appearance of young McBride to indicate that the mission upon which he was bent was other than innocuous. Moderately good-looking, there was little in his physical appearance to differentiate him from scores of other successful young businessmen. He was of medium height, athletic in appearance, quietly and tastefully dressed, clean-shaven and—altogether—absolutely without distinctiveness.

His friends and associates knew he possessed marked strength of character and a decided individualism—but to the casual observer of indifferent acquaintance he was merely another young American businessman who was, perhaps, rather more idealistic than the run of his fellows, yet whose chief claim to distinction was his amazing normalcy.

Born a gentleman, reared a gentleman, sought socially, member of the city's three best clubs, fairly prominent in the business world, single, popular—that was Walter McBride at thirty-two years of age. That was Walter McBride as he set calmly out to kill Dennis Morgan.

He walked swiftly, with a free-hipped swinging stride. He reached the ornate and pretentious apartment house in which Morgan maintained a bachelor suite. Morgan lived on the second floor. The elevator was not at the moment in evidence so McBride mounted the stairs, tried the knob of Morgan's door, felt it give to the touch—and walked in.

He found Morgan in the too

luxuriously furnished living room. At sight of the large pudgy man in his flowered dressing gown, a cigarette held loosely between pursy lips, colorless eyes blinking at him over the top of an evening newspaper, McBride's original sensation of disgust and unappeasable outrage came again upon him. He was suddenly glad he had undertaken the task immediately before him.

Morgan too was bell-born. He too was a bachelor, a member of good clubs—but he was a thorough rotter. Men despised and women feared him. He was a lecher, a philanderer—a smooth unctuous obtrusive individual, a disgrace to a family name which stood well upon the city's social register.

Morgan was much given to friendships in the underworld. He claimed as intimates a score or more of men and women whose means of livelihood were exceedingly shady and they fed upon him like leeches. He was a man utterly without morals of any sort, devoid of ethical standards, and for a year or more McBride had known it was Dennis Morgan who supplied to a shrieking local scandal sheet many of its juiciest morsels.

This publication—*Blair's Spotlight*—was a particularly obnoxious thing, a stench in the nostrils of a decent community. Its publisher delighted to devastate and seldom resorted to blackmail or accepted hush money. And he was usually so nearly right in his presentation of facts and so diabolically clever in his skirting of the libel laws that his sheet flourished. It was Blair's boast that this nasty little magazine could be found in the city's best homes—and it was also his boast that he was the most feared man in the state.

Morgan lowered his paper slowly. A slight pallor bleached his reddish complexion. His fishlike eyes blinked uncertainly beneath the level, uncompromising stare of his unannounced visitor. He fidgeted uncomfortably and struggled to make his greeting casual. "Hello, Mac."

McBride's head inclined slowly but McBride's eyes did not waver. "Good evening, Morgan."

Then came a pregnant silence. Once more the flush returned to Morgan's cheeks. The heavy-set man seemed to feel the tenseness of the situation. A peculiar chill pervaded the room.

"Have a seat," Morgan invited, with attempted casualness.

McBride shook his head slowly. "No. I didn't come for that."

"What did you come for?"

Walter McBride's lips pressed against each other to the point of physical pain. He became conscious of the fact that his astounding calm was deserting him now that the moment for action had come. He realised that his heart was thumping like that of a runner at the end of a 1,500-meter run, that his eyes were curtained, that it was necessary to spread his legs slightly to control the swaying of his body.

That was all. Beyond that he gave evidence of no emotion. He seemed calm, unperturbed, deadly. Nor was there any instinct to turn back or to reconsider the step he was about to take. Mere sight of the beet-faced man in the easy-chair fanned the flames of his bitter hatred and contempt. A sense of righteousness pervaded him and quite unconsciously he hunched his shoulders slightly and thrust his head forward the merest fraction of an inch.

"I've read today's issue of the *Spotlight,*" he said in a voice curiously flat and even.

Again the color drained from Morgan's cheeks. "Well," he said with a pallid attempt at belligerence, "What of it?"

"They are carrying a story about Mary Caveny and Dick Bonham—it is a rotten libel."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"That's a lie—and you know I know it's a lie. The circumstances were peculiar—very. On that sort of evidence Mary hasn't a chance. And, Morgan, aside from Mary and Bonham, there are only two persons in the world who knew of that perfectly innocent occurrence. One is myself, the other is you."

"I?"

"Yes—*you!* It was you and I who stumbled across them in the hotel. We both know they were driven there by the storm and a puncture. I was rather amused—you were apparently not interested. But the story in the *Spotlight* details absolutely what you and I saw. Mary's reputation is a choice morsel on the tongue of every scandal-monger in the city this afternoon. Everybody who knows her knows that the story is a lie. But that doesn't keep them from spreading it around. The fact that there is not an ounce of truth behind the rotten paragraph makes no difference."

Walter McBride paused. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead and he felt his nerves jumping like electric wires.

"Before I go any farther let me tell you that the minute the story appeared Bonham went to Mary and asked her to marry him. She refused. Less than an hour later I asked her to marry me. Again she refused.

"It may interest you to know also that Mary and I have been secretly engaged for more than six months. But she refused to marry me today because she thought my renewed proposal was a desperate attempt to save some shred of her reputation. I'm merely telling you about our engagement so you will understand that I have come to you today as a matter of duty and of right."

Dennis Morgan cleared his throat—his question came weakly and through dry lips. "I really don't see, Walter, what I have to do with all this."

"That too is a lie. I've known for some time that you were the source

of a great many of the particularly foul stories in the *Spotlight*—why, God only knows. You have money and position. It's probably just a nasty perverted twist to your mind. And if that alone had not been sufficient to arouse my suspicion, you forget that you—and *only* you—in addition to myself knew the circumstances published in the *Spotlight*.

"We saw Bonham in Mary's room—and we both knew there was nothing haywire in the situation. You're a heel, Dennis—a worse heel and coward than I believed a man could be. Now, tell me—why did you pass that story over to the *Spotlight?*"

"I haven't admitted that I did."

"That isn't necessary."

Morgan rose slowly from his chair. He was not a physical coward—he couldn't, as a matter of fact, understand why he had been so excessively nervous since McBride's entrance. His fat lips curled back into a sneer. "Well, if you're so damned smart—"

"You passed that story along to Blair, didn't you?"

"*You* say so."

"Are you afraid to admit it?"

Anger mounted in Morgan's breast. His face purpled with a sudden fury which was the more confounding because it was unaccountably late in coming. "I'm not afraid to admit anything, Walter. It's none of your damned business what I did or what I do. Yes, I saw Mary down there with Bonham—and yes, I gave the facts to Blair.

"Blair printed nothing but the facts. He left it to the public to draw its own conclusions. I have no doubt that Mary was innocent but it didn't *look* that way. And now"—he poked his head forward as he fired the question—"what in hell are you going to do about it?"

McBride stared amazedly. It was inconceivable that even consuming anger could drive the man to such an admission. His voice was quite steady as he answered Morgan's question. "I'm going to kill you."

Morgan laughed. "Don't make me sick," he said. "You talk like a dime novel. Going to kill me . . ." Then his eyes opened wide and he stepped away in sudden horror. "Put that damned gun away, Mac. Put it *away!*"

The eyes of the two men met and at the message Dennis Morgan read he cringed—slumped like a wet towel flung in a corner. "Wait—Mac! For God's sake! Think of the consequences."

"I've thought of them. I don't care."

"But, Mac—"

Walter McBride was surprised that the revolver made no greater noise. He had expected a terrific amount of reverberation in such a small room. He remembered long afterward the expression of shock on the face of Dennis Morgan as he turned slowly and then pitched forward. He remembered too—remembered vividly—the pungent odor of gunpowder—and then he

found himself staring at the gun and wondering what to do with it.

He decided to place it on the table, then changed his mind and slipped it back into his hip pocket.

He was peculiarly unexcited over the taking of a human life. He stood in the middle of the room, waiting for the other residents of the apartment to come charging in. He was glad it had happened this way—it would be better for them to take the revolver from him and summon the police.

He was a trifle ill in the presence of the body—ill but not regretful. Even yet he did not see how he could have done otherwise. The man on the floor was worse than a wrecker of homes—he was a destroyer of reputations, a man who had worked devastatingly from ambush.

So Walter McBride awaited the coming of neighbors—waited for them with a detached and impersonal curiosity. What would they say? What would they do? When they questioned him—well, he'd ask them to phone the police. Better tell the police about it—he was surprised to realise he hadn't considered what he was going to tell the police. Rotten thing to bandy Mary's name around Police Headquarters. Filthy mess, anyway.

But it was necessary, not for himself—to hell with the consequences as far as he was concerned. Morgan had merely got what was coming to him. But as for Mary—well, the public was talking, sniggering, tearing the girl's reputation to pieces on the rack of circumstantial evidence.

Better, perhaps, to tell what was what and insert a wedge of doubt in the bitter condemnation of the public. Only he and the dead man knew the truth—barring only Bonham. Even Bonham didn't know that Dennis Morgan had been an underworld sidekick of Blair's.

Why didn't they come? McBride grew impatient. Five minutes—fifteen maybe—passed and there was no commotion in the building, no rapping at the door, no surge of excited witnesses into the room. A faint doubt assailed him. Was it possible the shot had not been heard?

Another five minutes—ten—fifteen. It was awkward and uncomfortable in the room. No one relishes the society of the body of the man he has killed—no matter how justifiable the killing. McBride found it necessary to take a grip upon his overwrought nerves. They were leaping and crawling now that the thing was over.

So the neighbors had *not* heard. Prhaps he'd better tell them. No—that was silly. Thing to do was telephone the police. *Hello—Headquarters? This is Walter McBride. I've just shot Dennis Morgan . . .*

He walked unsteadily across the room to the telephone, turning the words over in his mind. *Wonder what the Headquarters number is? Not necessary—book says just ask for police.*

He picked up the telephone. Then

without thought he put it down.

It was difficult to deliver himself to the authorities—quite all right for them to take him—he hadn't committed a moral crime, no matter what a jury might decide. It was scarcely up to him to invite the police.

He determined to wait until the police came for him. Inevitably they'd do so. Then he'd smile and admit the deed. *Of course I killed him—somebody had to do it. Self-defense? No—just a plain execution. Why? Well, that was easily explained. . . .*

He decided definitely to wait for the police—but not here. The room was close, stifling, unbearable. The best thing to do was to get out. No hiding—they'd find him soon enough. . . .

He walked down the hall, out the door. He descended the stairs. The lobby was empty. He reached the street and turned homeward. Nobody was anywhere around. Queer about that. He passed two men but they didn't even glance his way. A policeman on the second corner apparently didn't know he was there. Funny, it seemed as though a policeman must know instinctively that he had just killed a man.

He walked on, his thoughts chaotic—awfully queer, the sense of relief which pervaded him. He had killed Dennis Morgan, anticipating arrest and trial. Without pausing to weigh his chances of safety he had realised that the possibility of conviction was slight. Juries are ever ready to applaud the man who acts as executioner under the unwritten law—and in this particular case the unwritten law came into play more forcibly than usual for Mary was innocent.

In a hotel room with Dick Bonham—seen there by Morgan and McBride—both Bonham and Mary so innocent of even an evil thought that they had laughed about it. An automobile trip, a rainstorm, a puncture, a hotel—and Bonham had gone to her room to see if she was ready for dinner.

Some of these facts, printed starkly and insinuatingly in *Blair's Spotlight*, had effectually robbed the girl of all shred of character. And Walter McBride had killed the man who was responsible.

He reached his apartment and sat stiffly in a chair. Thoughts were beginning to right themselves—to become ideas rather than impressions. He lighted a pipe. He reviewed again the details of the case and the impulse that had actuated him. As yet no tinge of regret had come—unwritten law or no unwritten law, conviction by jury or no conviction. As Mary's fiancé he had done only what he believed any man would have done.

Of course they would connect him with the case—and then he'd tell. Very simple. But somehow, while he did not fear the consequences of his act, the instinct of self-preservation deterred him from voluntarily handing himself over to the police.

He dined alone that night at the City Club. His favorite waiter hovered about solicitously until he irritably informed the man that he wasn't ill—merely not hungry. But he did take vast quantities of black coffee and smoke innumerable cigars. He waited at the club until ten o'clock, when the morning newspaper issued its bulldog edition, felt relieved and surprised that it contained no mention of the shooting.

He slept that night with aid of an anodyne. He telephoned for his coffee and the regular morning edition. That too proved barren of news. He had slept late and on his way to the office he obtained a noon edition of one of the evening papers. There, shrieking at him across all eight columns of the front page, was the first announcement of Dennis Morgan's death.

He bought a copy of the other evening paper and secluded himself from visitors on a plea of important business. Then he read the details.

Morgan's body had been discovered by the maid who was employed to keep his apartment and cook his meals. She let herself into the apartment at the usual time and proceeded directly to the kitchen. It was not until she went into the dining room to set the breakfast table that she had seen the huddled thing on the floor.

The best detectives in the city were on the case but already they confessed themselves baffled. Of course they had suspicions . . . not ready to issue a statement yet . . . not suicide, of course—no weapon found. Besides, the shot had not been fired sufficiently close for the flame to scorch the clothing. As to the dead man he was socially prominent and popular—if he had enemies neither the newspapers nor the Police Department knew of them. If they did they made no mention of the fact.

They were convinced that the shooting had occurred during the evening. That it might have happened the previous afternoon did not suggest itself to them. There were no clues. The popular theory seemed to be that it was a meticulously prepared crime. Certainly the absence of evidence was an indication of careful prearrangement.

Reading and rereading the newspaper articles, Walter McBride realised that his very indifference, his utter carelessness, was responsible for the lack of clues. He was unsuspected because he didn't care.

Of course he knew he should go to the police and tell his story. But that, after all, seemed an unnecessary jeopardy. His position was unusual—willing to face the consequences, having planned in advance to do so, he now found it unnecessary. He decided to wait and was amazed by the recognition of a well-defined hope that he would not be connected with Morgan's death.

The city buzzed with excitement. The shooting furnished excellent newspaper copy, both because of its mystery and because of the victim's

prominence. Those who knew ill of of the deceased did not speak it . . . no one connected his death with the recent scandal involving Mary Caveny and Dick Bonham.

As a matter of fact, had either been suspected, the suspicions would have died a-bornin', for both were able to account for every minute of their time during that twenty-four hours, each having been surrounded by friends who sought in the hour of trouble to prove their loyalty in the face of vicious gossip. Bonham had spent the night with friends. An intimate of Mary's had been with her.

But their perfect alibis were not needed for no one—save the Gargantuan and filthy-minded proprietor of the *Spotlight*—knew of Morgan's connection with the sheet. And what Blair knew he kept to himself. Even he did not know that Walter McBride had been present on the occasion of the dead man's discovery of the suggested scandal.

Nor did anyone know that for six months Mary Caveny and Walter McBride had been engaged. She was one of the most popular girls in the younger set and, as far as their acquaintances knew, he was merely one of her army of men-friends.

The day the scandal was flung to the public he had asked her to marry him. Her refusal had been based upon the fact that he was doing it to save some portion of her reputation. Then he asked that she permit their engagement to be made public. That also Mary refused. She was a prideful girl, stunned by this calamity, not knowing whence the blow had been struck but determined to bear her cross alone.

The second day after the killing, McBride read in the morning paper that the maid in Morgan's apartment had been arrested on suspicion. He made ready to give himself up—but by the time the evening editions went to press the maid was free. And so Walter did nothing.

Two men were held as suspicious characters but they also cleared themselves without any particular difficulty. Within a week the police admitted they knew nothing and the newspapers had relegated the story to the inside pages—all save one of the evening dailies, which was at war with the police department and used the killing as a weapon of ridicule.

A Police Department unable to solve so simple and crude a crime as this—the newspaper made it gall and wormwood to the chief and the detective force, caused them to develop a bitter personal animosity against the murderer who had furnished their enemy with such destructive ammunition.

But they discovered nothing. The more deeply they probed into the affair the greater grew their bewilderment. Within ten days the Police Department reluctantly threw up its hands and admitted the crime was unsolvable. But the members of the plain-clothes force

received a scathing lecture from the chief. They were instructed to find out something, no matter how long their quest.

During those ten days Walter McBride lived in a mental turmoil which was a queer admixture of elation and depression. His relations with Mary Caveny were distinctly unnatural but he was sure no one noticed.

He called frequently at her home, where he invariably found her surrounded by loyal friends who took this method of displaying their disbelief of the barrage of mud which was being flung at her by reason of the *Spotlight* publicity. He and she were seldom alone and then only for a few minutes at a time. Frequently he renewed his proposal of immediate marriage. Without hesitation she refused.

"I can't do it, dear—not now at any rate. No one knows we're engaged and people would construe our sudden marriage as a confession on my part—and a wild flight to the security marriage confers."

"That's rot, Mary. No one who knows you believes—"

"Perhaps not. But a good many who do not believe enjoy talking as though they did. And there are thousands of people in town who don't knew me and who do believe. I'd rather face this alone. How *could* anybody print such a vile thing?"

McBride scrupulously avoided mention of Dennis Morgan's death save in the presence of others. Then he allowed himself to be drawn into its discussion only when silence might have been regarded as strange. Once or twice on such occasions he fancied Mary's eyes were fixed speculatively upon him.

He discarded this idea as being the figment of an overwrought and sensitive imagination. Of course he would think such a thing—besides, he was more than half-sure that Mary knew Dennis Morgan had been with him the night she had laughed over the humor of her plight in the hotel with Dick Bonham.

It was impossible, however, that Mary should suspect his complicity and make no mention of the fact. He found himself studying her more closely, wondering what was going on behind her big serious brown eyes —knowing she did not suspect, yet wondering.

Another week passed. McBride's nerves were becoming jumpy under the strain. He wished now that the neighbors had heard the shot and that he had been arrested. Morally he had committee no criminal act but he realised with something akin to horror that he was rapidly developing a criminal complex. He was free where he should not be free. The acrimony of the Police Department irritated and somewhat frightened him. He knew things would not go smoothly with him should he be discovered now.

The prospect of facing the future under the burden of an eternal question mark was appalling. It

was not the act he had committed which dismayed him but the fact that it was hidden. It shouldn't have been hidden. He determined to interview the Chief of Police and make a clean breast of it. But quick reflection showed him the impossibility of that.

A man who avenges in the heat of passion and then delivers himself over to the police may be adequately protected by the unwritten law. But the man who shoots and then hides for three weeks loses the effect of the heroic gesture which can be made only immediately after the commission of the legal offense.

It was not that McBride feared punishment. He had killed Dennis Morgan in fine disregard for his own safety. But now he had barred the door behind himself—had made himself a criminal *per se* in that he had indicated the existence of something which demanded to be hidden.

Realisation of his anomalous position brought with it a haunting fear. For the first time since the tragic day of his meeting with Morgan he began to be afraid of discovery. There was something appalling in the idea that he might at any moment be stopped on the street by a member of the Police Force and taken into custody. A fine cringing figure he'd cut then! Unwritten law—he envisioned the anathema an enraged Police Department would hurl upon him!

He took to brooding. Friends commented solicitously that he was not looking well and he found that anodynes were becoming a nightly necessity. He experienced all the terrible apprehension of a haunted man.

And then one morning, almost a month after the killing of Dennis Morgan, the telephone rang. The jangling of the bell excited a sympathetic response in his taut nerves. He fairly barked his, "*Hello,*" into the transmitter.

"Walter?"

"Yes." His face cleared as he recognized the voice. "Oh! It's you, Mary?"

"Yes, I want to see you for a few minutes. When can you come over?"

"Right away, dear." A pause, and then, "You don't know how good it is to hear your voice."

A half hour later they were together. She was sober-faced and unusually quiet. The past month had taken its toll of her spirits. Yet she came directly to the point. "About a month ago, Walter—when that article was published in the *Spotlight*—you came to me and asked me to marry you."

"Yes."

"You've asked me several times since. Do you wish to ask me again?"

"Mary—of course!"

She rose. "Very well, dear. We'll be married this morning."

He stood before her, hungry hands on her shoulders. And then doubt assailed him. What right had he to marry this girl with the cloud of uncertainty hovering over him?

What right had he further to endanger her happiness?

But the past month had taken from him the power of immediate and positive decision. She left him alone in the room as she went to don coat and hat—and together they went to the Courthouse, where they secured a marriage license. Less than two hours later they were married.

It was a rather somber affair. McBride was in a daze of uncertainty—until he realised suddenly that this girl was his wife and that he loved her—and in that moment he knew that the cloud could not be permitted to hover always above them.

Eventually they were alone and it was then that he knew he must face the inevitable. He did not tell her where he was going or what he planned to do. She accompanied him without question.

For the second time within the space of a few hours they went to the Courthouse. He made his way to the office of the County Solicitor, on the second floor, and sent in his card. Within five minutes they were inside.

It was a dingy office into which they were ushered—drab and ill-kept and somewhat decayed. It had been constructed years before and ever since Roger Hardiman had been County Solicitor.

As Hardiman rose from his desk to greet his visitors the office lost its dingy drabness. He was tall and slender with cameo features and hair which was impressively iron gray.

Roger Hardiman was an institution in the county. It was almost as if he held the office of County Solicitor by inalienable right. For eighteen years he had held the office and as far as political forecasters were able to determine he would hold it until his death. Usually he was unopposed at election time and those who did occasionally run against him bitterly regretted it the day after election.

He was a picturesque character, a man without a party, bound by no rigid political affiliations. He stood for decency and justice and mercy. There were those who said that he controlled the entire system of criminal jurisprudence in the county—and they were not far wrong—but he was adored by his constituents.

He came forward slowly, one hand outstretched to each. He radiated human kindness. In his deep-set eyes was a warm humorous twinkle, and intense gravity. He bade them be seated and assured them that his time was theirs.

Walter McBride sat close to his wife, his hand in hers. On the threshold of confession, his nerves were steadier than they had been for weeks. . . .

"In the first place, Mr. Hardiman," he stated simply, "Mary and I have just been married."

"Congratulations. I'm proud of you, young man."

"A month ago," she interjected, "the day that horrible story appeared in *Blair's Spotlight,* he pro-

posed. But I couldn't marry him—not then."

"I understand." Hardiman nodded slowly. "You young folks are too prone to let the head govern the heart."

"Not entirely." It was McBride speaking. "That's why I have come to you today, Mr. Hardiman. I have a story to tell and I want you and Mary to hear me through without interruption. It is a difficult thing."

"Go ahead, son—go right ahead. Take all the time you want."

McBride talked. He began his story nearly a year before, with the day when he realised he was in love with Mary Caveny.

He told of his knowledge of Morgan's hidden relationship with *Blair's Spotlight,* of his decision to kill Morgan, of Morgan's belligerent confession and of the shooting.

He told of his intention to surrender to the police and of the strange chain of circumstances which had left him a free man—of his mental processes in the face of that phenomenon—and of how he found himself facing the knowledge that it was too late. Then of his realisation that it was a condition which could not continue to prevail.

"And that, Mr. Hardiman, is the truth—the whole truth."

As he finished talking it seemed that there was no sound in the room—no sound save the ticking of the big wall clock.

Roger Hardiman nodded briefly as McBride ceased talking. And then his voice came, infinitely gentle. "Son," he said softly, "I'm all-fired glad to have heard this thing from your lips. It's a plumb interesting story."

He paused—then went on as though speaking to himself, "I've been County Solicitor for going on nineteen years. Chances are I'll be here nineteen more. In all that time I've never knowingly prosecuted a man who didn't deserve to be prosecuted.

"As to your story, son—I believe it. I believe every word of it. And somehow I couldn't bring myself to ask the Grand Jury to indict you for killing Morgan. Even if you were indicted I'm afraid what I know would sort of influence me to assist the defense counsel considerably." Again he paused

"Yes, I'm glad you got this off your chest, Walter—it'll probably help you to sleep nights. Just try to forget it. I will."

"You—mean I'm not even to be arrested?"

"Just that, son—and I'll tell you something else. This is the second time in the space of a week I've heard that story. Of course I got some details from you I didn't hear before but it's the second time I've heard that you killed Dennis Morgan."

"The *second* time?" Walter McBride bent forward in amazement. "Who told you the first time?"

Hardiman smiled gravely as he nodded toward Mary, whose fingers were interlaced with McBride's. "Your wife," he explained simply.

you'll be the next to die

by . . . John Hawkins

A competent killer can be hard to find. And Pop was faced with finding one from a hospital cot.

JAKE REGAL SAID, "Murders come in threes."

Monty Squires yawned. "So what?"

This was the lobster trick and the *Blade's* city room was almost deserted. Over against the wall a bank of teletypes made their rhythmic thump and clatter. Far across the room a single typewriter stuttered along in noisy bursts. Brock Kerns, sports reporter, was having an after-hour try at the Great American Novel.

Monty Squires, night desk man, drank black coffee from a paper carton and listened while Jake took the newspaper business apart. Jake was seventeen, a copy boy, and full of ideas.

"In threes," Jake repeated. "Always."

Monty said, "You confuse me, son."

"Listen!" Jake's eyes shone earnestly. "If we get one murder we always get three. Last month there was that mess out in Sellwood. A logger shot his wife an' another guy—remember? Then there was that cop that got killed in the service-station stick-up. That makes three murders in a row. The cycle's finished, see?"

For more than a dozen years well-knit, exciting and ingenious mysteries, stemming from the busy typewriters of the Hawkins brothers, John and Ward, have appeared regularly in just about all the major magazines. Once in a rare while, however, a Hawkins goes off on his own, as brother John has done in this unusual, highly baffling novelet.

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Monty said, "What next, little man?"

A red flush darkened the boy's face. "Laugh!" he said hotly. "You'll see. Pretty soon we'll have another murder an' it won't stop with just one. Murders come in bunches—in threes."

"Do they?" a dry voice said.

The speaker had come into the city room silently. He was an old man, slender and frail. He had a thin hawk-face, a bony jut of nose, deep-set yellow eyes. His clothes were baggy, shapeless, seemed far too large. A shadowy smile haunted his friendly mouth.

Monty said, "Hi, Pop."

Pop Egan slanted a nod at the desk man and then looked at the boy. "So murders come in threes?" he said. "What about Russia? And Korea?" He lifted a hand. "You should tell Stalin about your theory, Jake. Maybe it would cut down the casualty lists."

"Hey!" the boy protested. "That's war!"

Mildly Egan said, "Some people call it murder."

The phone rang then, the shrill sound loud in the barnlike room. Monty scooped it up. "Desk," he said, "Squires speaking . . . What? Yeah, he's here. Hang on." He passed the phone to Egan. "For you, Pop. It's Eddy Rock."

Pop Egan said, "Thanks."

Eddy Rock's voice came to him clear and swift and edged with cold excitement. "I think I've got something for you, Pop—something big! I'm out in the West Shore district."

"You followed another ambulance, eh?"

"A police car this time," Rock corrected. "There's been a hell of a fire out here—one of the river cottages burned down. Unless I'm wrong somebody sloshed gasoline around to help it burn. The place belongs to Steven J. Mitchell. Does that mean anything, Pop?"

"No," said Egan. "Not much."

"He married Hildy Croft."

Memory stirred in Egan then. Hildy Croft was news on any man's paper. Peter X. Croft, her father, was one of the biggest men on the coast. He'd fought his way to a fortune before he was twenty. He was huge and shaggy, one of the pirates of industry, and dollars worked for him like rabbits.

Now he controlled shipping lines, railroads and half the lumber mills on the coast. But he'd never controlled Hildy. In spite of all he could do she'd married Steve Mitchell, an automobile salesman from the wrong side of the tracks. Peter Croft had sworn the marriage would not last—but it had. Hildy had lived with Steve Mitchell on his salary and liked it. And now . . .

"Keep talking!" Egan snapped.

"The neighbors tell me Hildy was twenty-one today," Rocky said. "She collected two hundred and fifty thousand, left her in trust by an aunt. She went on a buying spree. And she threw a big party at

a roadhouse out this way. She bought a new car but it wasn't in the garage when the fire started. The State Police haven't been able to find Hildy, Steve Mitchell or the car. The fire was set, Pop, and I'm sure one of them was in the house when it burned."

Quietly Egan said, "Which one?"

"That's anybody's guess, Pop. The whole house's gone and the ashes are still too hot to be explored. The firemen say it'll be an hour or two before they can get to the body. You'd better come out here, Pop."

"I will," said Egan.

He put the phone together, scowling thoughtfully. Monty said, "What's wrong, Pop?"

An old bitter light shone in Egan's yellow eyes. "Arson and murder," he said bleakly, "and maybe more than that."

Jake Regal said, "Murders come in bunches—in threes."

Eddy Rock met Pop Egan just short of dawn, in the shelter of a grove of trees beyond which, just out of sight, lay the smouldering ruins. Faint pallor lay beneath Rock's tan. His voice was husky and deep. "They got in, Pop. It was Hildy."

Egan nodded silently.

"She was in the garage," Rock said. "The bedroom was directly above. The floor split and let the bed slide down on top of her. It protected her body when the walls fell in. There's a big lump on the back of her head."

"Has her husband shown up yet?"

"The State Police are hunting for him. I—" He broke off, turning as a sleek wine-red sedan eased to a stop close by. "Wait!" he said. "Here's the guy right now!"

"And here come the cops," Egan added.

They reached the car just ahead of the two State troopers. The door swung slowly open. The driver looked up at them, squinting out of bloodshot eyes. He was deep-chested and big, about twenty-five. Egan guessed, an athlete gone to seed. A stubble of beard shadowed his jaw. His dinner jacket was rumpled and dirty.

"Is your name Mitchell?" a trooper asked.

"Sure," the driver said. "What's wrong?"

The trooper's mouth tightened. "We're not quite sure," he said, and stepped back. "Suppose you get out and take a look around. Maybe you can tell us."

Steve Mitchell said, "I don't get it."

"You will," the trooper promised grimly.

Egan watched Mitchell's face as the man slid from beneath the wheel. His expression was one of mild wonder, nothing more. He moved around the car to a place where he could see past the thick grove of trees. He stopped there, mouth twitching. His hands came slowly up.

"The house—burned down," he whispered.

The trooper said, "You catch on quick."

Steve Mitchell swayed, half-turned to catch at the trooper's arm. "Tell me what happened!" he cried brokenly. "Where's Hildy? She's all right, isn't she? She didn't get hurt?"

"She's dead," the trooper said.

All the lines of Steve Mitchell's face crumbled and went slack. Agony clouded his eyes. He let his breath go in a ragged sigh. "I knew it!" he said, in a voice that was choked and low. "That damn Gypsy!"

The trooper frowned. "Gypsy?"

"The one at the nightclub," Mitchell said. "Hildy gave her ten dollars and then the old witch wouldn't tell Hildy's fortune. The manager finally made her deliver." He paused, looking down at his shaking hands. "She said she saw death in Hildy's palm—violent death!"

The trooper said, "We'll check on that."

"I laughed at her. I thought—"

The trooper reached out to catch Mitchell's hands and pull them to the light. Mitchell's knuckles were bruised and swollen. Flecks of dried blood showed dark against his flesh.

"I got that in a fight," Mitchell said.

The trooper said, "Sure," his voice dangerously soft. "What time'd you bring your wife home?"

"I think it was around two but I'm not sure. I was—pretty drunk. I took a sock at a guy and Hildy wasn't speaking to me. We had the car full of people. There was an old guy named John Pitts—he lives just up the road. There was Dave Monroe and his wife and one other couple, the Whites. I dropped Pitts off first—then Hildy. Then I took the others home."

"Where'd they live—on the moon?"

"No. About four or five miles from here."

"Now it comes," Rock whispered.

The trooper inclined his head. "You got here at two. You took the others home. You had ten miles to drive—five miles each way." He looked at his watch. "It's five-ten now. You've got three hours to account for, Mr. Mitchell. Your story'd better be good. Where were you?"

"Riding around," Mitchell said. "I stopped for coffee at an all-night lunch wagon. But I changed my mind and didn't go in. Then I helped a guy get his car out of the mud down at the foot of Cherry Lane. That took a long time."

"He's hooked!" said Eddy Rock. "Hooked cold!"

"You helped a guy get his car out of the mud." A grim smile pulled at the trooper's lips. "You're a bad liar, brother. You should have remembered to ruin your shoeshine before you pulled that one."

"I wore rubber boots."

"Boots, eh? Where are they now?"

"The chap lent them to me."

"I thought it'd be like that." Cuffs made a cold jingling in the trooper's hand. "Put 'em out," he said, harshly. "You're under arrest!"

Steve Mitchell swallowed. "For what?"

"For the murder of your wife!"

Surprise and anger made a taut mask of Mitchell's face. His hands came up, lashing up. There was the sodden crack of fist on flesh and the trooper reeled backward, his mouth a crimson smear. Before the second trooper could move Eddy Rock had slipped away from Egan's side to drive in in that smooth cold way of his. Ducking under the sweep of Mitchell's arm he hooked a solid left to Mitchell's stomach. The big man gasped, bending double. Eddy Rock had a clean shot at his chin.

"Put the guns away," said Rock. "He's out cold."

II

It was mid-morning when Egan pushed through the double-doors of the *Blade's* city room. Exhaustion had cut deep lines about his mouth. His shoulders were bent with the weight of the hours just past. The girl at the switchboard gave him a bright smile. Egan crossed the big room to the corner where James Stackley, the city editor, had his desk.

"You did a nice job on this Croft story," Stackley said. "I'd give you a bonus but there're bigger things in the wind. Peter Croft's here to see you, Pop."

"What does he want?" asked Pop.

"Ask him. He's waiting in the M.E.'s office."

Dryly Egan said, "I will."

And he did, standing in the wedge of sunlight that fell through the windows of the managing editor's office. They were alone there—Egan and the big man who slumped in the deep leather chair. Peter Croft had been a shouting giant of a man who got what he wanted one way or another. Now the fight and drive had gone out of him and only hate was left. His rough-hewn face was black with it. It burned in his gray eyes, thickened his voice.

"I want you to help me hang Steve Mitchell!"

"What makes you think he should be hung?"

"He killed Hildy—murdered her in cold blood. She came into money yesterday and she was going to leave him. So he killed her. It has to be that way. And he's going to pay for it, Egan. I'll see to that myself!"

"It's a police job," said Egan quietly.

"The police!" Croft made something ugly of the words. "They'll do what they can. I've brought pressure to bear on them. But I've got to be sure, Egan. Plenty of killers have gone free because the District Attorney's case was wobbly or because of a loophole in the law. That must not happen this time! Steve Mitchell killed my daughter!" Croft's voice deepened. He made

fists of his square hands. "He's got to hang!"

"Have you talked to him?" Egan said.

"No," snapped Croft. "Why should I?"

"And Hildy? When was the last time you talked to her?"

"Not since she was married. But what—"

"So you're guessing," said Egan. "You're not sure what happened—you can't be. I talked to Mitchell and I was there when the police told him Hildy was dead. If he's guilty he's a great actor, Mr. Croft."

"You don't have to give me that," said Croft. "I'm willing to pay for your time. I know your reputation and I want you to clinch the case against Mitchell. I've arranged for a leave of absence for you."

"I'm a reporter," said Egan, "not a detective."

"It's worth a hundred dollars a day."

"Thanks but I'm not having any."

Rage darkened Croft's face. "Make it two hundred," he said savagely. "But get this straight, Egan. You'll work for me—or you'll never work for the *Blade* again!"

Softly Egan said, "You're a fool."

Peter Croft came out of his chair. "If you weren't an old ruin," he roared. "I'd damn well break you across my knee for that. You can't buck me, Egan. There's not a man in the state who can. You're through!"

And Pop Egan said, "Perhaps."

Half an hour later he was again standing in front of Stackley's desk. The city editor peered up at him, eyes troubled and angry.

"You fixed it," he said. "You really did."

"So you're tying a can to me," said Egan.

"That's the order," said Stackley gruffly. "It came from the top—from the big boss. So that's it, Pop." He tipped his chair back "But why the hell did you have to fly off the handle that way? Suppose you didn't want to work for the big slob? You could've smoothed him down, couldn't you? You could've sat on your fanny and drunk yourself to death and had that hundred bucks a day."

Egan said, "It wasn't for me."

Stackley groaned. "Tell me why?"

"I spent the morning at State Police Headquarters," said Egan. "The Governor and the State's Attorney called up. Every big-shot politician in this end of the world was on the wire. They were screaming for speed and more speed. The inquest's scheduled for this afternoon, the Grand Jury gets the case tomorrow. They'll have a rope around Mitchell's neck in a month."

"So what?" said Stackley. "He's guilty."

"Is he?" Egan asked. "The fact that a man gets his nose wet and has a fight with his wife doesn't mean he's killed her. Normally

there'd be a lot of investigation before the case was called complete. Not this time! Croft wants Mitchell to hang."

"All right. What's it to you?"

"Croft's using the *Blade* as a club. He's put the squeeze on the owners. That editorial on page one was a disgrace." Egan's face was wooden but a yellow fire lit his eyes. "I thought a newspaper's job was to dig for the truth—no matter how it hurt. The *Blade* should see that Mitchell gets a fair trial instead of playing stooge for Croft."

"You sound like a punk journalism student."

"Maybe I do," said Egan. "And maybe it's time a lot of us stopped laughing at honesty and ethics, Stack."

"Mitchell *can* be guilty, Pop."

"Yes," said Egan, and leaned forward. "But the way it stands he'll hang, innocent or guilty. How'd you like to be in that spot, Stack."

Stackley wet his lips. "I can't help him."

"You could tell the owners how it is."

"I like my job—I want to keep it." Stackley did not look at Egan. "And it wouldn't be smart to dig into this on your own, Pop. Be careful."

Pop Egan said, "I won't be alone."

He turned away, his face set in a bitter mask. An elevator dropped him eight floors to the street. Out of habit he headed south toward the river, pausing at the first corner to wait for a light change. The sidewalk crowd bunched up around him there. He watched the swift flow of traffic until a familiar voice called his name.

Pop Egan looked up. Eddy Rock's coupé was directly across the street and Rock was leaning out, waving.

"Be right with you," Egan shouted. And then a solid weight hit him squarely in the center of the back. Off-balance Egan pitched forward. The red truck bore down on him. And in that odd tight second Egan saw the driver's face go white with fear and horror. He heard the sudden squalling of brakes and knew the truck could not stop in time. Pain broke over him in a shattering wave . . .

He was cold, desperately cold, and a gray mist lay across the world. Dimly he could hear the far wailing of a siren, the rataplan of excited voices. Pop Egan set his jaws against the chattering of his teeth. He opened his eyes and the reeling sky fell down on him. Nausea swelled up in his throat.

"Eddy!" he whispered hoarsely. "Work . . . on this Mitchell . . . thing. *Eddy!* Do you hear . . . me, Eddy?"

"I hear you, Pop. I'll do it."

There was a dull throbbing in his right arm. From the waist down his body seemed to be gone—at least he could feel nothing there. And someone, some meddling fool, had sewed his eyelids together. He could feel cool hands on his body and

hear dim voices. He tried again to open his eyes and this time it worked. He saw the smiling face of a nurse and beside her, haggard and very grave, was Eddy Rock.

"Hello," said Egan. "How are you, boy?"

"Ssshh!" said the nurse. "You mustn't talk."

Egan said, "I've got to. Just for . . . a minute."

"Easy, Pop," said Rock. "There's lots of time."

"How long've I been here?"

"Six days."

"What's wrong with me?"

"The truck clipped you," said Rock. "Remember? You slipped off the curb and the guy couldn't stop."

"I was pushed off . . . the curb, Eddy."

Eddy Rock's eyes turned cold and dark. His mouth hardened and he made a fist of one brown hand. "Did you see who did it, Pop?"

Painfully Pop Egan whispered, "No, Eddy."

Ridges of muscle stood out along Rock's jaw. "I muffed this," he said, anguish in his voice. "I should have known you didn't fall. But the traffic was heavy and I couldn't see you when you fell. I—" He stopped, a shadow passing across his eyes. "I missed the inquest, Pop. I was busy here at the hospital. And the Grand Jury sat in secret session. They brought in a true bill against Mitchell."

"The trial . . . ?" Egan whispered as from a distance.

"It comes up in a week, Pop."

"Did you . . . find anything?"

Rock shook his head. "I decided there wasn't anything to find. I had a look at Cherry Lane. There wasn't a sign of a place where a car had been stuck. I thought Steve Mitchell had picked a name out of the air and guessed wrong. Now it looks like somebody made sure his story couldn't be checked."

"What about the car?"

"The one he said he pulled out of the mud? If the papers are right Mitchell doesn't remember much about it except that it was a sedan with an out-of-state license."

Egan said, "Hunt . . . for it, Eddy."

"I will," said Eddy Rock, "and I'll see what else I can turn up. But I'm not much good at this kind of thing, Pop. These people are all from the stuffed-shirt side of the tracks. I understand a South Side punk with a gun in his fist but these . . ." He let his breath go in a long sigh. "They get around me, Pop."

"I'll see what I can do, Eddy."

"You're out of it, Pop. You're going to be here for at least two months, maybe longer. The truck did a job on you. You've got a broken arm, some bent ribs and a lot of stitches in one leg."

Egan whispered, "Then bring 'em . . . to me, Eddy."

"Sure!" cried Eddy Rock. "I can do that. I'll be your legs an' eyes an' ears. I'll get 'em all here for you to work on. The people who

were with him in the car, everybody who went to the party. Everybody—but Mitchell."

Egan nodded. "And the . . . Gypsy."

"Hell! I forgot about her."

"Please!" It was the nurse. "You've talked enough. Mr. Egan's got to have rest."

"Tomorrow," said Egan. "Bring them then."

Eddy Rock said, "It's a promise, Pop."

But it was four days before the doctor would allow Egan to have visitors other than Eddy Rock. Four days, while bitter editorials in the *Blade* demanded Mitchell's quick conviction. The traction splint—a frame of light metal designed to pull the bones of the upper arm slowly into place—was an old and painful story by then. Egan learned to drink through a curved tube of glass. He stopped objecting verbally when the red-headed nurse gave him his daily bath. A small radio and a bedside phone gave him contact with the world.

There were five visitors in the first batch.

Eddy Rock herded them up to the foot of the bed. One of the men was sunburned and big and weather lines webbed the corners of his eyes. Beside him was a girl with a tawny mop of hair. Her glance touched Egan and slid evasively away.

"Mr. and Mrs. White," said Eddy Rock. "Sam and Dora." Then he moved his hand to point at the cherubic moon-faced man whose eyes were owlish behind thick-lensed glasses. "This's John Pitts."

Egan murmured, "Nice of you to come."

"And"—Rock's hand swung to the tall tweed-clad man, the dark and slender woman at his side—"Mr. and Mrs. David N. Monroe, Pop—Dave and Ellen."

"Well," said Sam White. "Let's get started."

And Monroe cut in, smoothly, "Suppose we let Egan do the talking. He asked us here."

"I did at that," said Egan. "But I couldn't bring this hardware to you." Painfully, he twisted his head to nod at the traction splint which imprisoned his right arm. "All you people rode with Steve Mitchell the night Hildy was killed. You're friends of his and—"

"Of Hildy's!" said Dora White hotly. "But not Steve's! Not after what he did at the club. He—" Her husband's hand closed on her arm and she fell silent.

"What happened at the club?" Egan asked.

"He thought he was Joe Louis—" Dora began.

Again the pressure of Sam's fingers stopped her. "I'll tell it," he said coldly. "There's nothing unusual about it, Mr. Egan. Steve had a few too many. He was mad about the way Hildy was spending money. He tried to get tough with a couple of us."

"With you?" Egan asked gently.

"Yes," said Sam. "But I talked him out of it."

Egan said, "What about the Gypsy fortune teller?"

This time it was John Pitts who spoke. "I was near her stand when it happened," he said quietly. "I saw the whole thing. Hildy gave the Gypsy ten dollars and then the Gypsy wouldn't read Hildy's palm. She looked at it and then tried to give Hildy's money back."

"Yes?" prompted Egan.

"Steve made—well, he made quite a fuss. He called the manager and the manager made the Gypsy read Hildy's palm. That's really all there is to it."

"What about Vee Piper?" Dora White cried.

Egan looked at John Pitts. "Well?"

The fat man mopped his face. "I don't like to say anything that'll make it bad for Steve. God knows that coroner put enough words in my mouth. Steve—"

Coldly Monroe said, "Steve knocked Piper down."

"And who is Piper?" Egan asked.

"He's an ex-boy friend of Hildy's" Pitts said. "Steve had a right to knock him down too. The Gypsy said she saw death in Hildy's palm, see? Then Piper made a nasty crack. He said maybe Steve was going to murder Hildy for her money. He meant it as a joke but it didn't sound like one. So Steve hit him."

Sam White said, "And the party blew up!"

"Hildy wouldn't talk to Steve," Monroe added.

"It was just a spat," Ellen Monroe said softly and Pitts threw her a look of gratitude. "We'd all been drinking, Mr. Egan. The quarrel meant nothing."

Egan said, "What happened on the trip home?"

Pitts said, "I got out first. I—"

"Nothing," said Sam White. "Not a thing."

"Steve dropped Pitts first, then Hildy, then the Whites," said Monroe, "in that order. There was very little said during the ride. We got home at two-ten and went right to bed. That's the end of the story."

And it was. At least nothing further was revealed in thirty minutes of talk. David Monroe was leaving when he turned back to say, "I'm afraid you're wasting your time, Egan. Steve Mitchell killed his wife in a drunken fight and tried to cover it by burning the house." Drooping lids veiled green eyes. "You had a little tough luck the other day and—"

"And what?" Eddy Rock cut in.

"It warped his judgment," said Monroe evenly, facing Eddy.

Egan looked at Sam and Dora White. "Do you recall anything that might help—anything at all?"

Dora White averted her eyes. And Sam White shook his head. "Not a thing," he said. "So long, Mr. Egan.

After the door had closed behind them John Pitts approached the bed. "Don't pay any attention to what they say." He blinked owlish

eyes. "Steve's too nice a boy to kill anyone. The only time I ever saw him mad was when he'd been drink—" He lagged to a horrified stop and then quickly said, "But Steve wasn't drunk that night. He'd had a few drinks but only a few."

Pop Egan said, "Thanks, Pitts."

The door eased shut behind John Pitts and for a time the room was quiet. Eddy Rock waited for Pop Egan to speak. He could wait, this Eddy Rock. He was stocky, dark and there was a coolness deep-grained in him, the ice-calm of a man who has seen much of violence and of danger. He was a race driver, one of the best.

Not so long ago, he'd been mixed up in a murder case—the phone had tagged him as a candidate for the noose. He had smashed that case and cleared his record. He had met Pop Egan. And there'd been understanding between them from the first.

"Give me their backgrounds," Egan said.

"David Monroe sells bonds, Pop. John Pitts is a city official. Sammy White's a life-guard during the season. Right now he hasn't a job and isn't hunting one. The Whites live in a houseboat on the river."

"Bank account?"

"Not that I can find." Rock's eyes were dark with thought. "If he'd let his wife talk we might have learned something. He's playing cute, Pop, and I want to know why. He's the one guy in this mess I'm geared to handle. He's from my side of the track."

Egan's head rolled on the pillow. He shifted his position, moving his right shoulder a little, cursing the wicked pull of the traction splint. "People are the same everywhere," he said. "Uptown, downtown, they have the same desires, ambitions. They kill for the same reasons."

"You make it sound simple."

"It isn't, Eddy." Pain whitened Egan's lips. He closed his eyes. "Bring the Gypsy next—tomorrow."

Rock said, "I will."

The next day, a little after two, he again stood at the foot of Pop Egan's bed. There was quiet laughter in his eyes and he tipped his head at the flamboyantly-dressed woman of forty-five who accompanied him.

"This's Madame Eva," he said, "the Mental Marvel. She foretells the future. She's a Gypsy from the Bronx."

The woman fumbled with her purse. "Hello."

"So you saw death in Hildy's hand," said Egan.

"Sure," the woman snapped. "Prove I didn't."

"And you're a Gypsy?"

"Professionally." She threw a venomous look at Rock. "This guy had it right. I'm from the East, see. I used to be in vaudeville with a mental act. So vaudeville dies an' that dumb partner of mine figures he's got to sit up with the body an' have his own private wake. A lady

has to eat, don't she? So now I'm a Gypsy."

"And up to your ears in murder," said Egan.

"Save that stuff for the chumps!" There was acid in Madame Eva's voice. "I said the mouse was goin' to die an' she died. That ain't murder—it's fortune telling. I'm good, see? I know my stuff. An' since—since the other night business's been swell." Her eyes narrowed suddenly as Egan's left hand went to the phone. "What're you goin' to do now?"

"Build a squeeze," said Egan dryly.

"Squeeze? What's that?"

"You say you're good," said Egan. "I'll make you prove it. I'll get a dozen handprints, male and female, and one of them will be Hildy's. Another will be from a condemned man in death row. You can demonstrate for us, for the police and for the reporters." His smile was wolfish. "You'll be famous —*if* you can find the two hands with death in them."

Madame Eva's mouth jerked. "T'hell with that!"

"If you don't"—Egan's voice was soft—"I'll have the police hold you as a material witness till after the trial. Then I'll pull the proper wires and hit you with every ordinance in the book. Fortune telling's a form of extortion—you can get a year for that. And that's only the beginning." He looked at Eddy Rock.

"It's Spring three thousand . . ."

Madame Eva's face turned the color of putty. Her rouge stood out like blood splotches. "I guess I better go along with you," she said weakly. "It was a gag. The whole thing was a gag."

"Yes?" said Egan and waited.

Words tumbled from Madame Eva's lips. "I got to give my business a shot in the arm once in a while. I got to keep the chumps comin'. So I pull one to attract attention, see? Like this Hildy thing."

Wearily, Egan said, "Go on, Eddy. Dial."

"Wait! I'll talk." Madame Eva sank down in a chair near the bed, clasping her hands tightly to hide the trembling in them. "I was paid to—tell her that. But how'd you tumble? The cops didn't get wise."

Egan's eyes flamed. "Who paid you?"

"Piper," she said raggedly. "A heel named Piper."

"That's all we want to know," said Egan.

Eddy Rock took the woman as far as the elevator. "It wouldn't be smart to travel," he told her. "Stay in town till this's over." Then he went back to Egan's room.

"So it's Vee Piper, the old boy friend," he said.

"Bring him here," Egan said.

"Sure." Rock fished a wicked little .25 automatic from his pocket and tossed it on the bed. "If Piper's the man we want, then he's the man who pushed you off the curb. He might know we had his stooge up here. He might decide to have

another try for you. Take care of yourself, Pop." Rock's mouth was thin and hard. "I've got things to talk about with Mr. Piper."

"Check at the bank too," said Egan. "Find out how much cash Hildy got that day."

III

A grocery clerk gave Eddy Rock directions. "Up River Road to McCarthy's farm, then east to the schoolhouse, then north . . ." Like that. But this was West Shore and the houses were few and far apart. Eddy Rock took a wrong turn somewhere and got himself pretty well lost. It was almost dusk when he found the house he was looking for.

The name was on the mailbox—Vonal Piper. That left an unpleasant taste in Rock's mouth when he said it aloud. He locked his coupé and started up the path. The house was a small Cape Cod, set back in a grove of heavy firs. The lawn had a patchy motheaten look.

Eddy Rock thumbed the bell. He heard the thin and lonely sound of its ringing deep in the house. And there was a muffled sound as if a chair had fallen on a thick rug. A chill wind sang in the eaves and overhead branches sighed. Rock turned his collar up. After a moment he punched the bell again.

Nothing happened. A full minute ticked away. A frown dented the flesh between Rock's eyes. He tried the door and it gave, swinging inward at his touch. The warm breath of the room met him, heavy with the smell of tobacco and sour wine. Rock slipped a flat .32 from his shoulder clip. He stepped inside and closed the door.

There was a nude, a badly done oil, above the fireplace. Red embers still glowed on the grate. Unease was alive in Rock now, crawling in the muscles of his back. He moved away from the door, and he saw the cigarette smouldering in the tray of hammered bronze.

"Hello," he said harshly. "Anybody home?"

There was no answer, but the plume of the cigarette smoke suddenly wavered and broke. Rock felt the touch of cold air on his cheek. Instantly, his mouth tightened. He moved silently across the room, stalking the source of the chill draft. He went down a short hall. He found the back door standing half open.

"Gone!" said Rock silently, "Just ahead of me."

He went out into the windy dusk. It was less than fifty feet from the back porch to the edge of the woods but Rock felt as big as a Goodyear blimp crossing that space. Outlined against the house he made a swell target. The smart thing would have been to leave by the front door and circle wide through the woods. Rock was tired of playing it smart. And somehow he felt there was need for speed.

His feet made no sound on the thick mould of the path. Here

under the trees the dusk had thickened to full dark. He felt rather than saw the trail and when it bent sharply to the east Rock lost it for a moment. He blundered against a tree. Ahead he saw the dull gleam of white. He went on, ten feet, fifteen . . . Then he could make out the grayish blotch of a man's shirt and, above it, the pale shining of a face. The man was standing in the center of the path. His arms hung limply at his sides.

This bothered Rock. It made no sense. Why would a man sneak out his back door when a stranger rang the bell and then wait in the middle of a dark wood-lot? If he was afraid to face a man in his living room, why pick a spot like this?

Rock said, "Keep your hands in sight."

The man did not move or speak. Rock moved on, wishing he'd brought a flashlight from the car. Slowly he closed the gap between them, the gun held ready in his fist.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "What're you doing here?"

He got no answer. Rock's mouth twitched and he felt the muscles of his stomach draw up cold and tight. He dug a cigarette lighter from his pocket.

"I don't like this," he said. "One wrong move, and you're a dead duck!"

The man turned his back on Eddy Rock! His hands did not move and his legs did not move and still he executed a slow about-face. Rock pressed the lighter switch and a wavering flame pushed the dark away. The circle of light touched the man's legs, his feet. A startled curse escaped Rock. *The man's feet did not touch the ground!*

Again he was moving, swinging in a weird, slow pirouette. His arms were limp at his sides but his fingers were hooked like claws. The light jerked up to a face black with congested blood. The man's head was canted sharply to one side. His bulging eyes gliste ed wetly.

"A corpse!" Rock breathed.

As though in answer the dead man wheeled again, turning in the wind. The rope was a manila line, new and yellow, and it had been thrown over a branch ten feet above the ground. One end was fastened to a tree within the reach of Rock's hand. An overturned applebox lay close to the dead man's feet. Eddy Rock released the lighter switch. The wavering flame died.

Rock moved forward to touch the man's hand. His flesh was cool, and Rock's expert fingers could find no trace of pulse-beat. The man had been dead for at least ten minutes. Someone else had been in Piper's house when Rock rang the bell—someone else had slipped out the back door and down this path. The prowler, whoever he was, was long gone now.

Eddy Rock got a flashlight from his car. He went through Piper's house, searching for a phone. Finding none he went back along the narrow trail. He used the light to

read the note pinned to the dead man's shirt.

Why stay, the sprawling letters asked, *when Hildy's gone? Maybe I'll see her there.*

Rock turned the light on the dead man's hands, on his face, then clambered upon the box to examine the rope. When he'd finished, there was a bitter downturn to his mouth. This was murder, not suicide. There were contact wounds on the dead man's hands—proof that he'd put up a fight. Shreds of bark were ground into the tough fibers of the manila line, showing that the man's body had been hauled up to its present position.

Tucking the flashlight under his arm Rock began the unpleasant task of searching the body. He found a billfold, fat with wadded bills and identification cards bearing Vonal Piper's name. A small address book was in one compartment. Time enough to check that later. Rock stuffed the wallet in his coat pocket. And then from both sides of the path, flashlight beams cut through the dark to trap him in their brilliant glare.

"Up!" a big voice grated. "Get those hands up!"

Slowly, Eddy Rock obeyed, lifting his hands to shoulder height. The voice said, "Hold it—just like that!" and a big trooper came out of the brush to the path. Light made a blue shimmering along the barrel of his gun; there was anger in his face. "Try something fancy," he invited, "an' you'll be as dead as that guy on the rope!"

"My gun's in a shoulder clip," said Rock.

"Thanks," the trooper jeered. He searched Rock with rough skill; he took the gun and Piper's billfold. Then savagely, he yanked Rock's right hand down and snapped a cuff around his wrist. Shoving Rock toward a six-inch fir, the trooper looped Rock's arms around the tree. And the other cuff clicked home around his other wrist.

"You can start talkin' now," the trooper said.

The second man, thick shouldered and solid, came out of the woods. He wore plain clothes. "Yeah," he said, and his voice was cold. "Give out, little man."

Rock told them exactly what had happened.

"Maybe," the plainclothesman said, "but you could be throwin' us a curve. Why the pickpocket act?"

Rock said, "I was hunting information."

"Yeah—an' what's your name?"

"Eddy Rock. I—"

"Aahhh!" Rage darkened the plainclothesman's face. "You're the guy that's horsin' around with Egan! I'm glad to see *you!*" He took a single step and caught Rock with an open-handed smash across the mouth. "It's time somebody taught you punks to stay to hell out of police business." He grinned savagely. "An' for once I'm glad some old gal saw a flashlight movin'

around an' got nervous an' put in a call. Yeah, plenty glad!"

IV

"What time is it?" Egan asked.

"Nine-ten," the nurse answered. "How do you feel?"

A grin shone in his hooded eyes. "Ungood," he said. "A traction splint is an invention of the devil and you can quote me on that. I itch. How's to fix it so I can do some two-handed scratching?"

"You're being silly," said the nurse.

"Did you ever wear a traction splint?"

"No."

"Try it," Egan advised, "and you'll itch too."

He turned his head to frown at the clock on the bedside table. "That switchboard girl hasn't been cutting off my calls, has she?"

"No, Mr. Egan."

"Hand me the phone," he said.

He dialed the *Blade*. "Give me Stack," he said, and waited for the city editor's answer. "This's Egan," he said then. "What's new on the Mitchell case, Stack?"

"Nothing, Pop. Not a thing. Why?"

"Eddy Rock's missing."

"The hell he is! Since when?"

"He's three hours overdue now."

"Three hours!" Disgust came into Stackley's voice. "Listen, Pop. The guy could've met a beer or a blonde. He could've had a flat tire. Your misery's got you jumpy."

"Check for me, will you, Stack? I'm serious."

"If it'll make you happy," Stackley growled. And in something less than ten minutes he called back. "Pop, the hospitals haven't got him. He's not booked anywhere. There've been no bad automobile crack-ups. Stop sweating. Eddy'll show up all right."

Egan said, "Thanks, Stack."

But a moment later he dialed the *Blade* again. "Let me talk to the brat," he said. The answering voice was young, cocky, and profane. "Jake Regal speakin'. Chief copy boy, stooge an' hats blocked to order. Shoot the chatter, chum. This was your idea."

Egan said, "Want to do a job for me, Jake?"

"Pop?" A gulp came down the wire. "Yeah, man!"

"Get over here in a hurry then."

"I'm on my way, Pop. I—ah—yes, sir!"

It was almost ten and visiting hours were over before he came. He wore a tie, which was strange for Jake, and he'd used water to flatten the wiry brush of red hair.

"Things came unstuck just as I was leavin'," he said. "So I'm late an' I had to crash the joint. A interne got in my way an' I climbed him like a monkey climbs a tree."

"What happened?"

"A guy did a dutch," said Jake. "He was engaged to Hildy Croft once. His name's Piper. He hung himself."

"When'd they find him, Jake?"

"Around seven. The story just come through."

"Did it mention Eddy Rock?"

Jake Regal shook his head. "Nope."

Egan's lips moved soundlessly. He looked old and very tired. He shifted uneasily against the pull of the traction splint. His yellow eyes were feverishly bright.

"Then Eddy's dead or he's in jail. He—wait! If he was dead the cops wouldn't keep it a secret. They couldn't! But they can hold him incommunicado." Egan's mouth drew tight. "We need a lawyer, Jake. He's got to be good."

"Abe Rose would break his back to get on page one, Pop. He's smart too." Jake grinned. "What else?"

Egan told him, whispering instructions in a dry thin voice. "I'm just guessing," he finished. "If I'm wrong you'll lose your job."

"It ain't worth much, Pop." Jake's grin was cocky. "I'll get Rose on the job. Then I'll get that stuff for you an' get back here first thing in the morning. Okay?"

"Yes," said Egan. "Good luck, Jake."

A nurse smoothed Egan's pillow and turned off the light. He lay still, staring up at the ceiling. Piper had paid the Gypsy to read death in Hildy's hand. Now Piper was dead. Suicide? Maybe—but this wasn't Japan, where lovers climbed hand in hand to the volcano's lip, then plunged in together. Piper had lost Hildy long ago and yet . . .

A man needed facts before he could think a thing through. Egan's mind turned to Eddy Rock and as the slow hours passed he wondered what had happened.

A nurse appeared in the door. "Are you awake?"

"Yes," said Egan. "What is it?"

"A friend of yours phoned. We couldn't let the call come up here at this hour but he insisted that you get the message. I wrote it down." She switched on the lamp and handed him a slip of paper.

"Eddy's in the gow," Egan read. "The bulls found him with the stiff. They're trying to throw the book at him. Looks bad. Details in the morning. Jake."

"I hope I got it right, Mr. Egan.

Bleakly, Egan said, "I'm afraid you did."

Morning again—Jake Regal was standing at the front of Egan's bed, his eyes red-rimmed and sooty with fatigue. He carried a rolled map under his arm.

"How's Eddy?" Egan asked.

"Jammed up, Pop. The cops are holding him as an accessory-after-the-fact, for concealing a crime, tampering with evidence and some other odds and ends. They got him an' they don't want to let go. Rose screamed till they booked him. He's comin' to tell you about it." Jake unrolled the map. "Where do you want this?"

"Thumbtack it to the wall."

Jake did as he was told and for a time Egan was quiet, studying the large-scale map of West Shore. Red

X's had been drawn through the houses of those who had been in the car with Steve Mitchell. There was a circle around the Mitchell place.

"Get this," said Jake and touched the X marking Sam White's houseboat. "It's a hell of a long way from White's to Mitchell's if you go by road. But a guy can row down the river in a few minutes. See what I mean?"

"Yes," said Egan thoughtfully. Then, "Are you a boy scout, Jake? Can you put a bandage on for me?"

"I had some first-aid once."

"Let's see how much you remember."

"Pop." Color came into Jake Regal's face. He was strangely abashed. "Maybe this ain't the time to ask but I been on Stack's neck for months, tryin' to get a crack at a reporter's job. He says I'm too young. If this works out okay could you—well, I mean . . ."

Egan smiled. "I'll do what I can. Get busy now."

Abe Rose came in a few minutes later, a sharp-faced little man, dapper and neat. He dropped his brief case on a chair and gave Egan a shadowy grin.

"Some client you gave me," he said.

"How bad is it?"

"Bail hasn't been set yet but it's going to be very high. The police are taking a crack at you by way of Eddy Rock. The lieutenant doesn't like you much. He wants to put Rock away for a year or two." Rose spread his hands. "And maybe he can."

Pop Egan looked at Jake Regal. "You know what to do next," he said. "Get started. And find out if Sammy White owns a boat."

"Right, Pop. We're on the beam now!"

"Or on the spot," said Abe Rose.

V

The nurse brought extra chairs into the crowded room. Giving Egan a look of disapproval she arranged them in a rough semi-circle at the side of the bed. Then she adjusted the pillows at Pop Egan's back. "You shouldn't sit up this way," she said. "And this bandage on your hand should be changed."

"Later," said Egan harshly.

The traction splint holding Egan's right arm was heavy and awkward. Painfully he turned his head, his bleak gaze traversing the room. Sammy and Dora White stood uneasily beside their chairs. John Pitts smiled, eyes beaming behind thick glasses. Dave Monroe whispered something to his wife.

Pop Egan said, "Shut the door, Jake."

Temper flared up in Monroe's eyes. "I will *not* stay here! You sent that—that brat of yours around to tell us Hildy's will was to be read here today and that we were mentioned. It was a rotten—"

"It was the simplest way," said Egan.

Smoothly, Abe Rose said, "Mr. Egan has uncovered some new facts

which have a bearing on the death of Hildy Mitchell. And Piper's suicide begins to look like murder."

"Who're you?" Sammy White growled.

"A lawyer," said Rose. "Take over, Pop."

Monroe's voice was a bitter lash. "I suppose you'll stage a reenactment of the crime, Egan. You'd think of something as silly as that. You're a fool, Egan. Mitchell killed his wife. No one else had a reason!"

Egan said, "I found twenty thousand reasons."

"Make it fifty thousand," Rose corrected.

"Double talk!" said White. "T'hell with it!"

"Hildy drew twenty thousand in cash from the bank the day she was murdered," said Egan. "She spent some but the rest has never been found. Her jewelry, some rings and one good diamond necklace are missing too. The total, money and jewels, runs close to fifty grand."

"The fire—" Sam White began.

Egan shook his head. "No, Sammy. Her jewel-box was fireproof and it was empty when the police found it. Her purse was on the floor under her body, open and empty. The police theory makes Mitchell a thief as well as a killer. And it's silly. Mitchell could have had far more, without risk, simply by going on." He paused.

"The police are right about part of it," he said. "Hildy was killed by a thief. And that same thief pinned a suicide note to Piper's shirt last night and then hung Piper in the wood-lot back of his house." Egan's smile was wolfish. "And Mitchell has an alibi for that one!"

John Pitts said, "Do you know who—"

Egan tipped his head at Sammy White. "Where were you last night, Sammy? Around dusk?"

"Home," said Sammy, harshly.

"Can you prove that?"

"Why should I?" Sammy exploded.

"Take a look at the map," said Egan evenly. "You are a mile and a half from Mitchell's by-road—but only a little way by water. You're broke and you haven't got a job. You know Hildy had that money—everyone at the party knew it. You knew Mitchell would need close to an hour for the round trip to Monroe's place. So you went back to Hildy's by boat, thinking she'd be asleep and you could help yourself. But she wasn't asleep—she caught you in the house and she put up a fight. You hit her, Sammy—you hit her too hard."

"Then I spilled gasoline around and set fire to the joint. Is that the rest of the story?" Sammy White's mouth pulled down in an ugly way.

"Something like that," said Egan.

"It's a case," said Abe Rose. "It's damn' near as good as the case the cops built against Steve Mitchell."

Dora White's hand went to her mouth. *"No!"* she cried. "Sammy didn't do anything. He was on the river—"

"Shut *up!*" Sammy White ordered.

"Tell them," she said, "or I will."

He gave Egan a frowning look. "I've got to tell it now," he said thinly. "I was on the river after Mitchell took us home. I'm part of a four-boat crew. We've been doing some salmon fishing at night with nets."

Egan said, "You were gill-netting?"

"Right—and the law doesn't like it."

"You're some detective, Egan," Monroe jeered. "You try to find a murderer and get a fish pirate!"

John Pitts said, "We can go now, eh?"

"I knew Sammy was lying," Egan went on, needlessly, "but I had to know why. Now there are no loose ends." He looked at the map again. "The two murders—Hildy's and Piper's—stemmed out of what was to be a simple robbery. And that robbery was planned for the time Mitchell needed to make the round trip to Monroe's home.

"The killer had no way of knowing Mitchell wouldn't get back until dawn. Monroe is out of it—he couldn't have got back to Mitchell's in time. Sammy White was pirating fish. And so—"

John Pitts whispered. "You can't mean . . ."

"Look at the map," said Egan. "You cut across lots and reached Mitchell's house almost as soon as the car did. You needed money desperately. You didn't plan murder but Hildy found you with her purse in your hand. You knocked her out. And then you remembered the Gypsy's warning and the fight Hildy'd had with Steve."

John Pitts said, "You're joking!"

"Only the people who rode home with Mitchell could be sure of the timing." Egan said. "You work for the city, Pitts. You're the man who ordered fresh gravel spread on Cherry Lane to cover all trace of the car Mitchell helped dig out of the mud. That wrecked Mitchell's alibi and put you in the clear."

There was the shine of sweat on Pitt's face. "Go on," he said huskily.

"You knew Peter Croft hated Steve Mitchell and that he'd do everything he could to rush Mitchell's trial and conviction. You wanted to be sure no one hunted for the truth. That's why you pushed me in front of a truck."

Pitts' smile was glassy. "And Piper?"

"He was blackmailing you," said Egan. "Somehow he guessed what had happened and decided to have a part of the money. You could see that going on for the rest of your life. You'd already killed once—the second time was easy!"

"You've got no proof!"

"There's the gravel," said Egan. "And when the accountants begin to dig into your books they'll find plenty of reason. The handwriting experts can probably tie the suicide note to you, Pitts. You've been very sure of yourself. That breeds carelessness." Egan let his breath go

in a long sigh. "While we've been talking, three private detectives had been searching your house, Pitts. They'll find Hildy's jewelry."

There was a gun in John Pitts' hand. "Hold it!" he said. "I'll shoot whoever tries to keep me here!"

Sammy White swore in soft astonishment. Dave Monroe seemed to shrink in his chair. Jake Regal pressed back against the wall, waiting. Abe Rose clutched the arms of his chair in a spasmodic grip.

"In the corner," Pitts whispered. "All of you!"

Pop said, "I can't get out of bed."

"I don't mean you," Pitts snarled, "but you'll be wise to keep your left hand in sight." Turning slowly he watched the others move into the corner of the room, hands held shoulder high. Then his eyes flicked back to Egan. "It wasn't robbery. I tried to borrow the money. I thought she'd lend it to me and I told her too much. She said she'd tell the police my books were short. So she had to die!"

Quietly, Egan said, "And Piper?"

John Pitts was backing toward the door now. "You were right about that. Piper walked in on me when I was looking at Hildy's diamond necklace. I—"

The shot was thunder in the room. Pitts spun, clutching at his shoulder, surprise and unbelief widening his eyes. He was cursing, trying to lift the gun, when Sammy White smashed into him and the two of them went down. Jake Regal was at Egan's side then, fumbling with the smouldering bandage that hid Egan's hand. He stripped away the burning gauze to disclose a .25 automatic.

"You sure waited a long time," Jake panted.

"I had to wait, Jake, till he walked in front of the gun."

Sammy White was on his feet again. "I got his rod, Egan. But somebody better get a doctor. He's bleeding pretty bad."

"We'll be knee-deep in doctors any minute now." This was Abe Rose, still pale and shaken. "Pop, I didn't know you could use your fingers when you've a broken arm."

"Neither did Pitts. But you can if it's the upper arm." Egan smiled tiredly. "I was afraid I might need a gun. I had Jake do the bandaging job for me."

"What about this search of Piper's house?"

"Pure bluff but it worked." Egan looked at Jake. "If I was a reporter, I wouldn't stand around when a hot story broke in my face."

Jake gulped. "Pop! You mean—"

"It's yours," said Egan, and the boy scrambled for the phone.

Abe Rose was smiling. "I'm going to have fun, Pop. I'm going to make a police lieutenant eat his shirt. "Eddy'll be here soon."

"I'll be asleep then"—Egan scowled at the crowd swirling in the door—"if this bunch of apes ever gets out and lets me try."

"Growl," said Rose softly. "You don't fool anyone."

the pickled punks

by . . . Fredric Brown

All Sammy the dimwit wanted was to learn about sex. It failed to enter his simple head he might set off a chain-cycle of murder.

MACK IRBY STOOD LEANING on a heavy cane, listening to the grind of the talker for the unborn show. The carnival crowd streaming down the midway flowed around him. He listened with ironical amusement on his lean face.

MYSTERY OF SEX read the banner over the front.

"Here it is, boys, the show they been talking about, the show you came out here to see, this is it, the sex mystery exposed, here's where you see it, male and female naked and unadornd, here's where you see everything, I mean everything, right before your very eyes, the naked truth, all on the inside and all for one thin dime."

Burt Evans had done all right by himself, Mack Irby thought, in finding a new talker. The guy was okay.

"Here it is, boys, the show you want to see, this is it, this is where you see it all and learn the naked truth, sex in the raw, stay as long as you like, continuous and now going on, all for only one thin dime, the mystery of sex."

Mack Irby limped only slightly

Mr. Brown may or may not be a Lochinvar. But certainly he came riding out of the West—Midwest at any rate—a few years ago to make his mark as a mystery writer in Manhattan, even winning a coveted "Edgar" from the Mystery Writers of America for his first detective novel. Since then he has been in full retreat, first to Taos, N. M., then to Venice, Cal., and is still scoring heavily in books and magazines. We are proud to offer this, his newest as yet unpublished novel, in short-novel magazine form.

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as he made his way to the ticket box. The talker reached to tear off a ticket and then stopped as he saw Irby grinning at him.

"How are the pickled punks?" Irby asked. "I'm Mack Irby."

"Irby? Oh—yeah. You did the grinding here before. Burt told me about you. Go on in and say howdy to him."

"Later maybe. If he's got a tip in there I might queer his pitch on the sex books. I'll be around a few days."

"Not going to ride out the season? You can get a job easy. Model show needs a talker."

"Nah, only two weeks. I'll loaf it out. I got my stake."

"Burt said you got some moolah out of the accident."

"Two grand—not bad for seven weeks."

"Hell no. Anyway luckier than the other guy in the car with you. He was killed, wasn't he?"

"Yeah, Charlie Flack. Well, tell Burt I'll look him up tomorrow. Got a date tonight. So long."

"My name's Barney King, Mack. Okay, I'll tell Burt."

Barney King picked up the mike again. "Here it is, boys, the show you came out to see, the mystery of sex, the naked truth, male and female unadorned . . ."

Mack Irby walked on down the midway and despite the limp and the cane he walked on air. He told himself, *this is it, boy, this is the show you came to see, continuous and now about to start, stay as long as you like, and all for forty-two thousand bucks.*

Forty-two thousand dollars stashed away safely, waiting to be picked up. And almost three thousand more in honest money, the nine fifty he'd put in postal savings earlier in the season and the two grand he'd got from the insurance company, pure lagniappe.

It needed music, that walk down the bright midway. And music it had. The music to his ears that was the overall sound of the carnival. The merry-go-round's organ, the combo of the jig show, voices and laughter and the strident selling spieling grinding over P. A. systems and the crack of rifles in the shooting gallery and singing yelling shuffling, the thud of baseballs and the soft rachets of fortune wheels and the basedrum call to bally.

Try your luck, mister, pitch till you win, the big show just about to start, three balls for a dime, see the strangest people on earth, win a kewpie doll for the little woman, get 'em while they're red hot, pick your lucky number, hurry, hurry, and inside the little woman will show you, win a ham, see the alligator boy, this is the show you came to see, naked and unadorned, every number wins a prize.

Mack Irby walking down the midway, rich.

What a break that accident had been! It had meant the whole forty-two thousand dollars was his instead of only a third of it. Charlie Flack had been tough about insist-

ing on that two-thirds split—but with some justification, Irby had to admit. It was Charlie who knew the ropes on robbing banks, Charlie who'd cased the job, done the brain-work and given the orders. Yes, Charlie had earned the two-thirds split—if he had lived to take it.

Charlie had been a tough guy but a careful one—even a careful driver. That accident the night after the robbery hadn't been Charlie's fault at all. He'd talked Charlie into driving over to a roadhouse near Glenrock for a little private celebration—but they were on their way there when it happened and neither of them had even had a drink as yet.

The other driver had been drunk and on the wrong side of the road—and a cop car had seen it happen. That's why there hadn't been any doubt about responsibility and why the insurance company that carried liability for the other guy had settled like a shot.

Of course a broken leg and seven weeks in the hospital hadn't been fun—but what wonderful news it had been when they'd told him Charlie Flack was dead. Only he and Charlie had known where the bank loot was hidden and now only *he* knew. So it was all his, *three*-thirds of that beautiful hunk of moolah.

Maybe he'd inherit Charlie's girl too. He'd know about that pretty soon now—unless someone had snagged off Maybelle already.

He saw that he was about to pass the mitt camp, the little square top with the big palms—human palms, not potted ones—on banners on each side of the entrance and the bigger banner across the top. DR. MAGUS, it read, PALMISTRY, ASTROLOGY, CARD AND CRYSTAL READINGS.

Mack Irby stopped. Right here and now, if Doc wasn't busy, he could get the score on Maybelle. If she'd tied up with somebody else it would be smarter not to look her up at all. Making a pass could cause trouble and trouble was the last thing he wanted right now.

He went to the entrance and called, "Doc!"

Dr. Magus came to the entrance. A little man with a gray goatee, silvery hair, sharp eyes twinkling behind gold-rimmed glasses, dapper. He held out a hand.

"Mack! Good to see you. Come on in and have a drink."

Irby followed him inside. "Just want to ask you a question, Doc. Afraid I haven't got time for a drink—want to catch somebody before they get away."

Dr. Magus smiled. "You have plenty of time, my boy. The model show is still putting on a bally—I can hear them—and that means at least one more show."

Irby laughed. "You win, Doc. Okay, one drink."

"We'll make it a toast to your getting back. Luck, Mack."

"Thanks, Doc. How've things been going."

"Fine. And now I'll spare you

asking that question. Maybelle is still free."

Mack Irby stared at him. How the hell had Doc known he'd wanted to ask about *Maybelle?* The guess that he'd been heading for the model show wouldn't have been a hard one for Doc to make but there were three girls with the model show and either of the other two would have been a more natural guess for Doc.

Trixie Connor because she put out for cash and so would be a sure thing if she didn't already have a date. Or Honey McGlassen because he'd dated her before, nothing steady but half a dozen times maybe. And he'd never once made a pass at Maybelle because she'd been Charlie's.

Suddenly a frightening thought hit Mack Irby. What if Doc, that smart little bastard of a mentalist, really *could* read minds? What if right now he was reading about . . . Mack tried to jerk his mind away from the bank robbery, from the money and where the money was hidden.

He said quickly, "Thanks, Doc. But I really got to run. Got to see somebody else before I look up Maybelle."

He got out of there as fast as he could.

Down the row of hanky panks. There weren't any marks in front of the milk-bottle game so he stopped there, reminded. He'd need a place to take Maybelle tonight, if he got her, and he might as well line it up now. It wouldn't go to waste. If he couldn't get Maybelle he'd find someone else—after seven weeks' continence he wasn't sleeping alone tonight.

Jesse Rau, who ran the ball game, pitched a sleeping top he was always willing to rent for an hour or a night. Ordinarily Jesse and his punk, Sammy the halfwit, slept in it, but if he rented it for all night Jesse and the punk would doss down under one of the bally platforms.

Irby said, "Hi, Jess. Got your top rented for tonight?"

"Hi, Mack. Back with us, huh? About the top, I dunno. It's cool tonight and—"

Irby said, "Five bucks?"

He didn't want to argue. Jesse usually got two or three. He put a five on the ledge, knowing Jesse would take it. And what the hell was five bucks tonight?

As he walked away he heard Jesse telling Sammy to get their stuff out of the top.

At the model show, two of the girls were out for the bally, Honey and Maybelle, standing there in thin silk bathrobes that showed every curve of their bodies. As he looked at Maybelle's body he found himself breathing a little hard, almost feeling dizzy he wanted her so bad.

He raised his hand on the chance she'd notice the movement and see him. Miraculously she did. With a finger of the raised hand he made a little circular gesture that meant

around behind the top. He caught her slight nod.

He went around behind and waited, taking a long drink out of the flat pint bottle of whiskey he'd been carrying in his pocket.

Then the canvas lifted and Maybelle ducked under it. His arms were around her almost before she could straighten up, pulling her against him, his hands running down the silk of her back, down over her buttocks, cupping them, pulling her so tightly against him that they were almost off balance.

"Maybelle honey, I got Jesse's top lined up. Will you meet me there after the show?"

Her low voice sounded amused. "My God, Mack, you sure don't waste time, do you? What makes you think I want to?"

"Honey, you know I been hot for you all season. You *got* to!"

She fended off his lips. "Now-now, don't mess my make-up or I won't."

"How soon?"

"Hour maybe. Around midnight." She laughed. "You act like a man who hasn't had a woman in seven weeks. Didn't you even make a quick stop on the way here?"

His quick breath told her without words that he hadn't. She laughed again softly. Then, with him holding her as he was, she did a grind. And *grind* has two meanings in show business, one for carney talkers and one for burlesque dancers.

Then she suddenly pushed him away and went back under the canvas.

It took him a minute to get control back. Lord, what a woman. Forty-two grand and a dame like that! He'd take her with him for the winter. Fancy suites in fancy hotels. But for tonight the sleeping top would do. Hell, anywhere would do—the middle of the midway or the top of the ferris wheel.

In the sleeping top he lay waiting, sweating a little despite the coolness. And worrying. What if she didn't come?

But she came and it was wonderful and later he lay beside her, naked in the cool air.

A foolish thing to do and a hell of a good way to catch pneumonia. But of course that doesn't matter if you're not going to live until morning.

II

Burt Evans, after he straightened up from the body, stood there listening to be sure no one had heard the thud of the tent stake.

Then, cautiously, keeping close to the sidewall, Evans walked around the penny arcade top to the midway and stood ready to step out into the light, listening first for footsteps. No sound came. He stepped out.

And saw Dolly Quintana coming toward him. She wore moccasins so he hadn't heard her. She stopped and stared at him and the direction of her gaze made him realize what he was still holding.

In concentrating on walking

softly, on listening, he'd made the horrible blunder of forgetting to drop the weapon he'd just killed Mack Irby with.

Almost a fatal mistake, then and there, for Dolly. Then he realized he couldn't safely kill her. She'd stopped, still three paces away, and no matter how fast he moved she'd have time at least to scream. And a scream would bring dozens running.

So he turned and tossed the tent stake back into the darkness, casually as though it were nothing important. He said, "Hi, Dolly, know if the chow top's still open?"

"I hope so." She came forward again now. "Couldn't get to sleep and I'm hungry."

He fell in beside her. "I can use some coffee myself."

His mind worked furiously. This was dynamite. Dolly was the wife of Leon Quintana, the knife thrower with the freak show, and Quintana was insanely murderously jealous. It was dangerous just to walk or talk with Dolly, yet now he had to stay with her until he had a chance to kill her without her being able to scream. Or until he figured another answer. It had to be figured before Mack Irby's body was found. After that Dolly would have his number—in spades.

Evans wondered if he were strong enough and quick enough to choke her to death, right here and now, without her being able to scream. He glanced sidewise, weighing the chances. Then he heard the shuffle of feet—someone was coming. And they were nearing the chow top already, in any case.

He spoke quickly. "We better not go in together, Dolly, but I want to tell you something. Go in first, take a table away from anyone else. I'll sit near enough to talk to you without sitting with you."

He saw her slight nod and stopped to let her go in alone. When he entered a minute later he saw to his relief that the place was empty except for Dolly at a table way back and Barney King at the counter. He went back and sat at a table next to Dolly's but not facing her. He faced instead so he could watch the entrance and could also keep an eye on Barney and Hank, the counterman, now waddling over to take their orders.

When Hank had gone and was out of earshot he said, "Don't look this way, Dolly, but listen. I'm going to reach over and drop something in your lap. Look at it, but under the edge of the table, out of sight."

He made sure of the entrance and Barney and Hank and then stood up and leaned across far enough to toss into Dolly's lap the tight roll of bills he'd just taken from Irby's pocket. He hadn't counted it but it had looked like several hundred dollars.

He turned away from Dolly again. In a minute he heard her voice, low as his own. "Jeez, two hundred and forty bucks! What the *hell* . . . ?"

"Put it away quick. It's yours if you want it."

"If I *want* it! When Leon never lets me have a penny of my own? With this much I can get *away* from him. But—*why?*"

"For forgetting you saw me on the midway tonight."

Quiet a moment and then, "Oh." She'd remembered what he'd had in his hand and had figured it out.

"A deal?" he asked her.

But Hank was coming over with their orders. She waited till he was back behind the counter. Her voice was low, almost a whisper.

"Damn right a deal. And I don't care *who* you killed back there. This is *getaway* money. I can get away from Leon now."

He'd suspected she felt that way. He was glad to be sure of it. Because it meant she wouldn't share the money—and the secret along with it—with Leon Quintana. That would have given him one more to worry about.

He finished his coffee as quickly as he could and went out.

Evans was glad he hadn't had to kill her. Dolly was a good kid.

Dr. Magus woke. Someone was shaking him, saying, "Doc, Doc," in a frantic whisper. A woman's voice. Sounded like Maybelle's.

"Go 'way," he said. "If I wake up you won't be there."

"Doc, this is Maybelle. I need you."

He rolled over on the bedroll and found he'd rolled against her knees. She was really there, kneeling beside him.

"Doc, somebody killed Mack Irby. You got to help me."

He sat up. "Mack Irby? When? How?"

"It—it must have been half an hour ago. They hit him with something over the head. The back of his head is—*ugh!*"

He put an arm across her shoulders, pulled her down to sit beside him. "Take it easy, honey. Where do you come in? Were you with him?"

"We were in Jesse's sleeping top. We ran out of whisky and he pulled his clothes on and said he'd wake Pop and get us some. He crawled out and didn't come back. After a while I got worried and remembered a kind of *thunk* sound just after he'd crawled out and I got to thinking—well, I went out to look and he was dead, just outside. Somebody'd killed him with—well, something like a tent stake."

"Had he been rolled?"

"How would I—all right, yes he was. I wanted to know that too so I felt in his pockets. Just change. And whatever money he'd had wasn't in his coat, either; he'd left that back in the sleeping top. I crawled back in and felt in it too. There was a folder that felt like traveler's checks, but no money."

"Who knows you were there with him?"

"Nobody, as far as I know. But listen, Doc, the cops will find out

somehow. They'll ask everybody and Honey and Trixie will tell them I wasn't in my own bunk—they hate me."

"But if they don't know you were with Mack . . ."

"Doc, the cops will figure it. And I can't tell them where I really was—unless somebody'll back up my story and say I was with them all night."

Dr. Magus smiled gently into the darkness. "A light begins to dawn —a lovely light." He cleared his throat. "And far be it from me to look a gift horse in the mouth, especially when the gift horse is so shapely a filly but—why is it so important to you to keep out of it?"

"Doc, the cops would—well, I've been in trouble before. I got a record. They'd never believe I didn't finger him for the kill."

"What were you in trouble for?"

"Just shoplifting. Three or four times and one time I had over a hundred bucks worth and that made it grand larceny instead of petty. I did six months. Doc, they'll throw the book at me. This is a *murder* rap, Doc. Don't think they don't third-degree women on that, women with a record."

"Ummm—I guess they would, my dear. And on your own story, if you told the truth, they could book you on a morals charge and use it to keep you on ice. But before I stick my neck out to alibi you, you don't mind if I doubt your word on one little thing?"

"I *didn't* kill him, Doc. And I *don't* know who did."

"Those things I believe. You're not a killer, my dear. But money is something else again. Mack might or might not have been rolled before you looked to see. Or his money might have been in his coat. Now since it would be more dangerous for me to give you an alibi if you have any Mack Irby money than if you haven't, will you overcome your maidenly modesty while I make one thousand percent sure that you are not concealing so much as a sawbuck that might have been in one of his pockets?"

She giggled a little. "Okay, Doc. It won't take you long to find out, me wearing only shoes and a wrapper."

"Good. I remove the shoes first . . . No, nothing in the shoes. And now the wrapper . . . No, nothing. And now, keeping firmly in mind that money can be concealed, at least conceivably, upon any part of the body by being fastened down with adhesive tape, and that a tightly folded bill can be concealed, well, almost anywhere, and that it is too dark for me to see . . ."

He missed no inch of surface, no nook or cranny.

Maybelle giggled again. "Doc, no police matron ever gave me a search like *that.*"

"No police matron would have the same ulterior motive. And I found no money on you but I found something just the same—I found how badly I want to give you an

alibi for tonight. So if necessity arises, wearing a blue uniform, we shall say you spent the whole night here and tell only half a lie. Oh, my dear . . . !"

And Maybelle, all of whose amours had been with younger and less experienced men, learned a few things that night that she had never known before. Young lust and then experienced lechery, with a murder in between. All in all, it turned out to be quite a night for Maybelle.

III

Under blankets in the chill of early dawn, Dolly Quintana lay beside her husband, trembling not from cold but from fear. Fear of the very thought of what he could do to her if she ran away and he came after and found her. Not fear of death—she wouldn't be afraid to die, not a clean death.

But killing wasn't what Leon had promised if she ever even tried to run away from him. It was acid—acid thrown into her face to blind and disfigure her so no man would ever want her or even be able to bear looking at her.

And he'd find her, no matter how long it took him. He was crazy jealous, really crazy in that one way although he was sane every other way.

She'd been so fiercely happy when Burt Evans had given her that money and now she was wishing he hadn't. Because the money had meant freedom and now she was finding out she didn't have the courage to take it.

And if she didn't run away now the money was a danger. Oh God, if he ever found that money. He'd never believe anything she told him, the truth or a lie, about how she got it. Even if he did believe her he'd beat her near to death for holding out on him.

Why had she ever been so crazy as to marry him? Oh, she guessed she'd loved him then but now—now it was horrible when the only times he ever touched her he hurt her because he'd come to be so that the only way he ever had fun sexually was when he hurt her, and now there wasn't any love left for him, just fear, and she hated to be close to him like now even when he was sleeping.

Oh God, wouldn't it be wonderful just once to have a man make love to her gently, why almost anybody, especially Joe Linder. She could really love Joe Linder and he wanted her too, she could tell, she could feel it just the way he looked at her any time Leon wasn't watching his face.

But don't think about that, it would be awful if Leon found that money, but he wouldn't because she'd stashed it before she'd come back here, not in too good a place and somebody might find it before she could get it back but at least nobody would know it was she who'd hidden it there.

When Leon went into town today like he'd said he was going she

could get it from its temporary hiding place and with time to do it in, with Leon gone, she could hide it in a place where it would be safe and he'd never find it in a million years, right in his own trunk, not hers, because she knew he sometimes looked through her trunk. He kept that old cornet at the bottom of his trunk, the one he used to play a long time ago, and he hadn't touched it for years. It was broken too, but he kept it because he was superstitious about it for some reason and the roll of bills would slip right down in the horn out of sight and . . .

There was a babble of voices from outside, quite a distance away, a lot of people all talking excitedly. Leon must have been partly awake because he heard it too and sat up.

"What the hell's that?" He pulled on trousers and a shirt and went under the canvas sidewall. When he came back he started undressing again. He said, "Mack Irby, that guy used to be talker for the unborn show. Somebody killed him and rolled him last night."

Cops. The lot was full of cops. There seemed to be dozens of them although actually there were only four.

They got to Dr. Magus a little after ten o'clock. Rather, one of them did. A lieutenant named Showalter. He was big, but not tough—outwardly. He was soft spoken, almost gentle.

He was smart, too, but not too smart. Dr. Magus, who found himself strangely interested without knowing why, had managed to make it a conversation rather than an interrogation and had learned more than he had told. Sammy, the boy who worked for Jesse Rau, had found the body.

The police were convinced that a woman had been in the sleeping top with Irby but the lieutenant showed no inclination to doubt Dr. Magus's story that Maybelle had spent the night with him. He'd already had that story from Maybelle and had come to Dr. Magus merely to confirm it.

The time of death had been set as somewhere between two and three o'clock. There seemed to be little doubt that he'd been killed for his money. How much had he had?

"We know within a few dollars, as it happens," the lieutenant said. "We phoned Glenrock and the boys there checked up. He had a hundred and twenty-seven dollars on him when he was admitted to the hospital. Probably spent about seventy-five of it, ten a week, while he was there—cigarettes, newspapers and stuff—so he left there yesterday afternoon with about fifty in cash and an insurance company check for two thousand.

"He went right to the Glenrock bank and cashed the check—took two hundred in cash and bought traveler's checks with the rest, eighteen hundred. The checks were still in his coat pocket. So he left Glenrock with around two hundred

and fifty. Figure his ticket, one meal, a bottle or two of whiskey—maybe fifteen bucks. He'd have had about two thirty-five in cash. That's what the killer got."

"And, how disappointing if he knew about the insurance settlement and expected two thousand. But the killer must have been stupid if he thought Irby would carry it all in cash."

The lieutenant shrugged. "Killers sometimes are stupid." He grinned suddenly. "Doc, you're the only guy around here that hasn't acted like I got leprosy, just because I'm a cop. Maybe that ought to make me suspicious of you, but it doesn't. If this was a con game set-up you'd be my first choice, but you don't look like you'd kill with a tent stake. Say, what's an unborn show?"

Dr. Magus smiled. "An unborn show is a collection of foetuses in glass jars. It is also known as a punk show and the foetuses as pickled punks. Whatever the grind is, that's the joint. Usually they're human foetuses in various stages of development, but occasionally there's an animal foetus if it's a freak one.

"Burt's unborn show, the Mystery of Sex, has the foetus of a two-headed calf. But that's just an extra attraction—the pitch is on the human foetuses—male and female, naked and unadorned. Which, of course, they are."

"Fake or real?"

Dr. Magus shrugged. "Probably real because they'd be cheaper to get. It's carney tradition to kid an unborn show man about Goodyear trade marks on the kiesters of his pickled punks but it's just a stock gag. Maybe it would pay to fake a freak foetus, but ordinary ones—hell, anyone who has a friend in the right spot in a hospital or morgue can get all the foetuses he wants for a few drinks or at most a few bucks. Rubber ones would be more expensive."

"That's all there is in the Mystery of Sex show?"

"Practically. Plus a pair of flashy wall charts of male and female anatomy in cross section. And also a table with stacks of sex books on it. That's where Burt's profits come in, pitching those sex books to the marks, once they're inside. That's why the admission is only a dime, to get the marks in so he can sell them books at two bucks a throw."

After the lieutenant had gone, Dr. Magus felt thoughtful but couldn't figure out what he was thoughtful about. It wasn't wondering who had killed Mack Irby. He didn't care about that. But something was stirring at the back of his mind and he wanted to know what it was.

He sat down and pulled over the madball, the crystal sphere in its silver stand, and stared into it. Not because he ever really saw anything there except once in a while when he was a little drunk, and then it always scared him, but looking into it helped him to concentrate. Usually, that is. This time it didn't.

Mid-evening and Sammy was glad because Jesse was drinking and when Jesse started drinking on the job he nearly always closed the place early. And Sammy would be free to wander around the lot while the rest of the carney was still running.

Tonight he was especially glad they might close early because Jesse was mad at him. Jesse had bawled the holy hell out of him this morning and had been mean ever since, all because he'd found a dead man and instead of pretending he hadn't he'd called people to tell them. And how could Sammy have known? That was the bad thing—you never knew what you were supposed to do when something new happened and so many new things kept happening that you were always in trouble because you'd done something wrong.

And if Jesse ever got *too* mad at him, Jesse wouldn't take care of him any more and they'd come and get him and put him in a place behind bars because he couldn't take care of himself. He'd been in a place like that for a long time once and then one day he'd found a door open and had gone away.

And he'd nearly starved to death for a long time until Jesse found him and taught him how to set up the milk bottles for the game and took care of him and fed him. That had been about a year ago, he thought, anyway there'd been one winter since it happened, and he'd been with Jesse ever since.

Maybe tonight if Jesse closed early, he'd have time to spend the fifty cents in his pocket for cotton candy. Mr. Linder had given it to him early this afternoon for running an errand and he hadn't had time to spend it before Jesse had opened the game.

Jesse took another drink and then said, "Okay, kid, let's knock it off. We done enough today."

Sammy remembered something he'd wanted to ask. "Jesse, how old am I?"

"Hell, I don't know. Eighteen, maybe twenty. Why?"

"The cop asked me. I didn't know."

Jesse growled at him. He shouldn't have mentioned the cop—it reminded Jesse about his finding the man dead and telling people. For a moment he thought Jesse was going to hit him again but Jesse didn't. He went away. Sammy straightened things up and fixed the curtain in front of the booth and turned out the lights. Then he was free.

A few minutes later he was eating his first cone of cotton candy. And staring at the bally of the model show. Miss Trixie and Miss Maybelle were on the platform in their silk wrappers. They were both pretty but Sammy watched Miss Trixie. He liked Miss Trixie—she gave him quarters for running errands sometimes. And she treated him nice.

Some of the other women acted like they didn't like him around

but Miss Trixie didn't mind. Her silk wrapper was pulled tight around her over her round full breasts. He wondered what they were for. And why men paid money to go in the model show and watch the women pose in just tiny G-strings and cheesecloth bras you could see through?

It had something to do with something called sex, he knew, and something men did to women or the other way around. He'd wondered about it a few times and found himself wondering again now. He'd asked Jesse but Jesse got mad at him for asking, so he couldn't risk asking anybody else.

But suddenly it came to him where he could find out without having to ask anybody. There was a show called Mystery of Sex right on the lot. It would tell him. And he could have three more cotton candies and still have a dime left to get in.

He bought his second one and with it strolled down the midway to the Mystery of Sex.

" . . . see everything, boys," Mr. King was saying. "I mean everything, the sex mystery exposed, red hot, right before your eyes, this is the show you came to see."

Yes, Sammy had come to see. He stepped to the ticket box and put down his dime. Mr. King looked at him and didn't take it. He said, "Hell, kid, you're with it. You don't gotta pay. But—wait a minute, I just thought. You don't want to go in there now. Burt's got a good house and you might queer his pitch on the books, see?"

Sammy didn't see but he nodded. Mr. King said, "Tell you what, Sammy. Come around some afternoon when business is slow and you can go in for as long as you want. But there's nothing in there but pickled punks, kid. Unborn babies. What you want to see them for?"

"I don't want to see babies, Mr. King. But I want to see what you said, about what sex is and naked and things like that."

Mr. King shook his head sadly. "Believe you me, Sammy, if you're starting that far behind scratch, what you'd see in there would only confuse you worse. Get a dame to show you some time—that's the only way."

"Show me what, Mr. King?"

"The most wonderful thing on earth, kid. And you look old enough to be showed."

"Would any woman show me, Mr. King? Would Miss Trixie?"

Mr. King chuckled. "I don't know about *any* woman, kid, and you better be careful who you ask. But Miss Trixie—she would, sure, for enough money. Folding money."

Then a group of people started by and Mr. King looked at them and started talking into the microphone. "This way, boys, this way to the sex show—"

And Sammy wandered off. He had three more cotton candies and then his money was gone. He wondered how much money Miss Trixie would want. A lot, probably, more

than he'd ever have. He'd never had even one piece of folding money.

He wandered off the midway, around behind the circle of tops, hoping he could find someone to talk to, someone who wasn't working. There was a light on in one of the trailers, Mr. Evans' trailer. He knocked and when there wasn't any answer he tried the knob and it wasn't locked so he went in. Mr. Evans wouldn't care if he looked at pictures in magazines. He'd let Sammy look at pictures before.

But there weren't any magazines in sight so he opened a cabinet door. And found them and leafed through them. Then he wanted to put them away but couldn't remember just which cabinet he'd opened and found them in. It could have been one of several.

The first he tried wasn't the right one; it had linens in it. The second had books, about a dozen books of different sizes and shapes. He wondered if the books had pictures too. He took one out and looked to see.

It had pictures. The first one he turned to was a picture of a man and a woman naked and in a strange position. Strange, anyway, to Sammy. And he turned pages and saw more pictures, lots of pictures, but they were all pictures of men and women naked together. He studied them and found within himself a growing excitement, a kind of excitement he hadn't known existed. This was it, this was the show Sammy had come to see, here's where he saw it, male and female naked and unadorned, the mystery of sex, the naked truth.

He looked through the other books too; four more of them had pictures and he studied them but the rest were just printing and he put them back right away.

Then he closed the cabinet carefully because Sammy suspected that if Mr. Evans guessed Sammy had looked at those books he might tell Sammy not to look at them again. But if he didn't know he couldn't tell Sammy not to.

He was glad when he got to the sleeping top to find that Jesse was sound asleep and snoring. He got under the covers quietly so Jesse wouldn't wake up. Jesse didn't.

IV

Dr. Magus woke to misery and the sound of rain on canvas. His watch told him it was ten o'clock and his aching head told him there was no use trying to go back to sleep. He'd drunk too much, much too much. At the rate he was drinking he'd never live to see sixty. But why the hell did he want to see sixty? What had sixty ever done for him?

At least he'd left himself a pick-up shot in the bottle. He downed it and it stayed down. He slogged through mud and rain to the chow top and put himself outside a breakfast that he didn't want but knew he should eat. He slogged through mud back to the mitt camp but the

rain had stopped. He felt almost human now.

What was it, he wondered, that had bothered him about Mack Irby? No mystery about why he'd been killed, certainly. Then what *bothered* him about it?

He realized suddenly that it had been the way Mack had acted that night, Monday night; when he'd dropped into the mitt camp. He'd behaved naturally at first. But then he'd called the shot on where Mack was heading and who he was going to see there. Just a good guess based on observation—he'd noticed looks Mack had given Maybelle back when she'd been Charlie's woman.

A mentalist watches reactions automatically. It's his stock in trade in giving readings. He comes to do it subconsciously even when he isn't working. And Mack Irby had reacted big, just a few seconds after that hit about Maybelle. Fear, it had been—naked fear and a sudden hurry to get the hell away from there.

And the fear certainly hadn't been physical fear so it could mean only one thing. That lucky shot had made Mack Irby suddenly afraid Dr. Magus could really read his mind—and there was something in his mind he was desperately afraid to have read, something damned important.

Mack had had a guilty secret, an important one.

For a moment he toyed with the possibility that Mack had engineered the accident that had killed Charlie Flack—but he couldn't have. If there'd been anything off beat on that accident the insurance company wouldn't have settled so quickly. And hell's bells, cops had witnessed it.

But what then? No kind of petty larceny would get a reaction like that from a man as tough as Irby. If it wasn't a killing, it had to be something big, something with real money in it like a payroll robbery or a bank robbery.

But Mack Irby, tough though he was, just couldn't have been in that kind of a league. But wait a minute—Charlie Flack could have. He'd figured Charlie for a red hot the first time he'd seen him. A bank robber or gangster either on the lam or just holing in with the carney between jobs. And he and Mack had become close friends. He could have taken Mack with him on something big.

He'd have to talk to Maybelle. She'd known Charlie before Charlie had joined the carnival in the spring. Now that he was dead she'd have no reason not to tell him what Charlie had really been. And it would be easy to get it out of Maybelle by giving her a reading—she'd been wanting him to.

He took another drink of whiskey from the fresh bottle he'd bought when he'd gone for breakfast and decided he felt up to giving Maybelle that reading now.

It was drizzling again though, and he hated to go out in it. But he

sighed and donned galoshes and slicker. He stepped out, intending to start his search at the chow top because she'd been there half an hour ago when he'd breakfasted and might still be there.

But luck was with him. Sammy was going by. He called Sammy. "Sammy, do you know Maybelle?"

"Sure, Mr. Magus."

"Will you find her and tell her I said to ask her to drop in the mitt camp as soon as she's free and has time? Look in the chow top for her first." He flipped Sammy a quarter.

"Sure, Mr. Magus, I'll find her. Say, will you tell my fortune sometime, Mr. Magus?"

Dr. Magus laughed. "I'll tell it right now. You're going to get rich, Sammy."

"You mean paper money, folding money?"

"Lots of it, maybe sooner than you think."

Giving Maybelle a good reading was almost too easy. She didn't even realize that she told him Charlie had been a bank robber but that he'd reformed and was going straight. She was sure he was. Yes, he was gone from the lot sometimes but that was because he was crazy about fishing. He and Mack had gone on a fishing trip together just the day before the accident—they'd been gone all day. All day—and they hadn't caught a fish.

He sugar-coated the reading by telling her what she really wanted to know, that she was absolutely safe, that the police would never learn that it was she who had been with Mack Irby just before he'd been murdered. A leisurely reading, interspersed with drinks. Dr. Magus felt pretty good when it was over and when she leaned forward and put her hand on his.

"Thanks, Doc," she said. "Thanks a million. I'm not worried any more about Monday night. And listen, any time you want to alibi me again like you did then, just say the word."

Dr. Magus smiled. "Thank you, my dear. I will say the word bebause I know the word, the perfect word that ends unnecessary words. The word is *now*."

Burt Evans had not slept well. In the long hours of the night he had come to the reluctant conclusion that Dolly Quintana was too dangerous to him to be allowed to live. Not that he thought she'd ever give him away to the cops—but there was still the explosive situation caused by Dolly's fear of Leon and his psychopathic attitude toward Dolly. Giving her the money had been a mistake, he saw now.

If she stayed, Leon would find it sooner or later, force the truth out of her—and believe only part of that truth, the name of the man who'd given it to her. If she ran he'd go after her and if he ever caught her it would be the same thing.

Dolly must die, and quickly—the

end of the season was only ten days or so away—tonight, if possible.

In the long night he'd worked out a foolproof method. He wouldn't have to kill her himself. Leon would only too readily do that if he caught her sleeping with another man.

Joe Linder, talker for the freak show, would be the man. He knew damn well Linder was crazy about Dolly, that if it wasn't for Leon he night even want to marry her. He had a strong hunch Dolly liked Linder. He thought he could set up an assignation between them if he worked it right. Of course Joe Linder would get killed too and that was unfortunate but it couldn't be helped.

He talked to Joe Linder first, right after lunch. Joe listened and was pathetically grateful for what Evans offered to do for him. The first step of Operation Dolly was successful.

By three o'clock the rain had completely stopped. Evans leaned against the bally platform of the freak show and pretended to watch the cat men putting shavings on the midway, actually watching for Leon to leave. He'd already learned, round about, that Leon intended to go into town and that would give him a chance to talk to Dolly.

He'd be damned careful about it, just the same. He'd been careless last night—he'd left his trailer unlocked. And Sammy had come in and had spent some time there. He knew it was Sammy because the magazines hadn't been as he'd left them. Only Sammy would have got at those magazines. The pornography books had been messed with too, but anybody could have looked at them.

Nobody besides Sammy, though, would have looked through the magazines. It gave Evans gooseflesh to think what might have happened had Sammy got into the suitcase under the bunk. Well, he'd learned; he'd never again leave the trailer unlocked. How had he ever been so stupid as to do it once?

Three-thirty—damn Leon, wasn't he going after all?

Then Leon came out and Dolly was with him. He swore to himself. That messed things for today. He'd have to wait.

But he watched them walk away and they separated near the main entrance. Leon went on through it and Dolly started off for the show top.

Burt walked to the entrance and stood there until he saw Leon actually board a bus. Then he strolled to the chow top. Dolly had sat at a table with Bess Streeter but he saw that Bess had finished eating. There were only empty dishes in front of her so she'd probably leave before Dolly did. He got himself coffee and took it to a table near them.

When Bess Streeter left, he moved over.

He said, "Don't be scared, Dolly. I saw Leon actually get on the bus,

so this is safe. And don't worry about anybody telling Leon we sat and talked together. Everybody with the carney hates Leon and likes you." He watched her closely. "Especially Joe Linder."

Her color mounted. He'd been right. He said, "Listen, I've got something important to tell you. Joe Linder is in love with you and wants to help you get away from Leon. Don't look afraid like that, act as though we're talking casually about nothing important. Can't you?"

"I'll—try."

"Good girl! Here's the way it is—Joe Linder wants to help you get away. But he'll stay with the show himself till the end of the season so Leon'll never connect the two of you, if you go sooner, tomorrow. And at the end of the season Joe'll join you. Will you let him help you?"

"OhmyGodyes!" One word.

Burt Evans smiled. But he said, "Damn it, act as though we're talking about the weather. Here's the plan. Joe's brother and sister-in-law got a little farm in northern California. He's going to spend the winter with them—you too. You'll take off tomorrow or next day, depending when he or I can rig something to get Leon off the lot again. Joe'll give you a letter to his brother. You'll go there and wait for him."

"But—but next season . . ."

"Think Leon could ever find you in Australia? That's where Joe was already planning to go. He's got another brother there, with a carney, and he'd already decided to make the jump."

He could hear her breathing. She was damn near crying and he'd better finish his pitch and get away fast. He said, "Take it easy. You and Joe will need a chance to talk this over tonight. I got something for you here that will make it safe as houses." He took a quick look around to be sure no one was watching and then put a tiny glass bottle under the edge of her coffee saucer. "Stick that in your purse quick, out of sight."

He waited till she'd done it. "That's some sleeping stuff. Safe but powerful. Leon always takes at least a drink or two after the last show, doesn't he?"

She nodded.

"Get that in his whiskey bottle and it's in the bag. If he drinks all of it it won't hurt him, but if he gets even a little he'll sleep like a log. Wait till he's sound asleep—this stuff won't *put* him there. It'll just keep him there when he does sleep. But once he's sawing timber you can count on at least five or six hours while even a bomb wouldn't wake him up.

"Then you go to Joe's sleeping top. He'll be waiting for you and you can fix up the details between you. Okay?"

Dolly nodded. And looked again as though she might cry, so he got away from her quickly before she could.

V

When Maybelle left Dr. Magus dressed again. Regretfully, for now after that unpremeditated and delightful interlude he could have slept for a while, and soundly. But fortune beckoned brightly. Everything he'd learned from Maybelle had been on the side of his hunch.

He dressed meticulously in his best clothes, added spats and a panama, took a malacca stick from the foot locker and made his way across newly spread shavings to the entrance.

He enjoyed the cab ride downtown to the office of the Bloomfield *Sun*. He enjoyed the deference his dapper dress gained for him in that office. He was shown to a table and there was given and left with a bound volume of issues for the second half of the year, July 1st to date.

He decided to look for the accident first, knowing offhand only the approximate date, some time late in July. And he thought it was a Friday. He found it in the issue for Saturday, July 30th—it had happened just before midnight on the 29th. The story was brief and the only things he learned from it that he hadn't known before were the name of the driver of the other car and the fact that he, like Charlie, had been killed.

But he knew the date now. And Maybelle had said that Charlie and Mack had been gone from the lot all day the day before the accident. That would be Thursday the 28th. And since the *Sun* was a morning paper, he tried the issue of Friday the 29th. What he was looking for was there, right on the front page.

MASKED DUO ROBS
UNION CITY BANK

He read it carefully. Two armed men had held up the First National Bank of Union City at 2:25 P.M. and escaped with $42,000 in cash.

Dr. Magus very carefully refrained from whistling and read on. The men had worn handkerchiefs, tied bandit style over their faces, just below the eyes. One had stood guard while the other rifled the vault and the cashiers' money drawers. The money had been stuffed into a musette bag. It had been mostly in old bills of relatively large denominations.

According to the president of the bank the reason for this was that the bank acted as a clearing house for other banks in the county which wanted to exchange such bills for new or smaller ones. Periodically they were sent to the Treasury Department for replacement.

On leaving the bank the men had been seen to drive toward the downtown section of Union City in a dark blue Chrysler sedan. A car answering that description had later been found abandoned on a downtown street and was ascertained to be a stolen car.

That was all.

That was enough. Dr. Magus returned the bound volume to the

file clerk with grave thanks and took his departure.

Outside, he took a long deep breath. It all fitted too perfectly to be concidence. Union City was only about forty miles from Glenrock, where the carney had played that week, and on the same main highway. It was even closer to Campton, the town they'd played the week before. Charlie would have started casing the job from there.

It had to be. It was.

Charlie had been killed the day after the robbery and now Mack was dead too and *where was the forty-two grand?*

Was it, could it be, hidden somewhere on the carney lot? Not the lot itself, of course, but hidden in something that moved each week with the carney? Mack Irby had rushed for the lot the moment he'd been released from the hospital. Why else unless to get the money? Oh yes, Maybelle. But a man with forty-two grand can have his choice of a lot of women as pretty as Maybelle or prettier, in Florida or Mexico or wherever he wants to go.

Who had Mack's trunk? No, it couldn't be there—surely the police, investigating his murder, would have found out who was holding his effects and searched them. And what had happened to Charlie's trunk?

Dr. Magus sighed, realizing what his next step would be. Never before in his life had he gone to a police station voluntarily. He went to one now, asked for Lieutenant Showalter, found him in.

He asked if any relatives had come forward to claim Mack Irby's effects. It seems that he had lent Mack a book on astrology and he'd just remembered where it was. It was an old out-of-print book, quite valuable to him.

The lieutenant shook his head. "Wasn't any book in his trunk, Doc. I helped look through it, one of the first things after we got out there."

"Do you know if he'd gone to the trunk that evening before he was killed? I'm thinking he might have got it out to give to me and then left it somewhere else."

"Nope. Wiggins, your carney owner, was keeping it for him and said he hadn't seen Irby that night. And he couldn't have gone to his trunk anyway because it was under a lot of other stuff in a storage van."

"Could anyone else have taken the book from his trunk?" Dr. Magus asked. "Not that anyone would steal it alone but if the trunk had been rifled . . ."

"It hadn't. It was locked and the key was in Irby's coat pocket. It hadn't been opened while he was gone. Wiggins was sure of that."

Dr. Magus sighed again over his lost irreplaceable book, and departed.

Wiggins would be the best person, he decided, to ask about Charlie Flack's trunk. And Wiggins always stayed at a hotel, the best in town,

instead of living on the lot. He might be at the hotel now, especially since the carney wasn't playing this afternoon. He asked for the best hotel, found it, found Wiggins in it.

He gave Wiggins the same song and dance on an astrology book he'd given the lieutenant, only this time it was Charlie he'd lent it to.

"Sorry, Doc," Wiggins said. "Night of Charlie's death I helped two Glenrock coppers go through Charlie's trunk, just like Monday morning I helped two Bloomfield coppers go through Mack's. Then they took it away."

"You're sure there wasn't a book in it?"

"Almost positive. We went through things pretty fine because they were looking for anything that would show a name and address of some relative they could notify of Charlie's death. But we didn't find any and as far as I know the Glenrock coppers are still holding the trunk. You could write and ask them to make sure about the book."

"Maybe I will. Thanks a lot anyway."

"Don't mention it, Doc."

Back in the mitt camp, early evening, Dr. Magus decided to hell with working. Thinking seemed more important. So did drinking. He wanted to recapture the beautiful edge he'd had early in the afternoon and had lost somewhere downtown.

To hell with the twenty or forty bucks he might take in. He was shooting for forty-two thousand—if he could figure out where it was.

He hung out the *Closed* sign and made doubly sure he wouldn't be bothered by closing and lashing the tent flaps. He made himself comfortable and drank and thought.

Chances were poor of his being able to get the money unless it had been hidden with the carnival. If they'd rented a safe-deposit box or left the money, say, in a suitcase checked somewhere, he'd have a devil of a time getting it even if he learned where it was. But he didn't think that was what they'd done with the money.

If a suitcase check or a receipt for a deposit box had been found on either of the men or in their effects, the police would have looked in the box or claimed the suitcase, just as routine procedure, and would have found the money. Besides, he had an idea they'd have liked to keep the money near them, right at hand, if they could figure out a safe place for it.

But where would be a safe place? Where would *he* hide something on the lot? It would have to be in something at least as big as the musette bag they'd carried it off in. Well, maybe not quite so big—the money had been stuffed into the bag hurriedly and maybe neatly stacked and compressed . . . Well, it would still take, say, half a cubic foot of space.

He thought a while and drank a while.

Later, when he felt just right

for it, just drunk enough and in the right mood, he pulled over the madball, the crystal. He stared into it, making his mind a blank. The few times it had actually worked for him he'd done it that way.

From outside the canvas came the carnival sounds, the merry-go-round playing *Blue Danube,* the voices of the talkers, the crowd murmur, the blend of sounds that added up to a single sound as familiar to him as the beating of his own heart. He let himself hear that sound until he could hear it no longer, until it was part of the night and one with the night, as silent as night itself.

There was a sudden bright flash of light in the crystal, then for a brief instant darkness.

Dr. Magus blinked and again the crystal was as it had been before, reflecting his own distorted face and the interior of the mitt camp curving upon itself like an Einsteinian universe.

He looked around to see if that flash could have been the reflection of a sudden light somewhere. It couldn't have been. Not even from outside—his canvas had no tears or even thin spots. It was new and whole.

He frowned. Had he really seen that flash in the crystal or had it been the sudden twinge of an optic nerve?

If he'd really seen it and it meant anything, what could it mean?

He tried again and nothing more happened. After a while he gave up and pushed the crystal back. He had another drink and thought some more.

A thought hit him that was so simple and logical that he wondered why he hadn't thought of it sooner. It might lead him to the money even if it wasn't with the carnival. He'd start tomorrow from the logical place to start from, see what he could learn there at Glenrock, at the hospital.

He drank a toast to Glenrock.

VI

Standing in the dark, looking, watching through the window of his trailer, Burt Evans sweated.

Something had gone wrong. It was after one o'clock—the freak show had closed almost an hour and a half ago—and Dolly should be coming any moment now but Joe Linder wasn't in his sleeping top waiting for her! If Dolly came now Joe wouldn't be there and the whole plan would foozle.

Why wasn't Joe Linder waiting for Dolly? What had gone wrong?

Or could he have missed seeing Linder come in? He didn't think it was possible—he hadn't left the window once since midnight. At midnight he'd gone over to check up with Joe and Joe hadn't been there. He'd come right back and hadn't left the window since. Joe couldn't possibly be there—unless, well it was barely possible he'd come around the top and gone inside it during the half a minute

it had taken him to walk back to his trailer.

Suddenly he *had* to know, for sure, whether that had happened. If it had everything was still all right. If it hadn't—well, he'd know, for sure, that something had gone wrong.

Quickly he left the window and stepped across to the door and outside, leaving it open behind him so he could get back in quickly. He stood a moment, just outside, hesitating.

What if Dolly comes now, he wondered. Then he had the answer to the problem, at least. He could tell Dolly to go in Joe's and wait and he'd scour the lot to see what had happened to Joe.

He took the first step toward the sleeping top and then stopped as he heard footsteps coming behind him. He turned swiftly and then relaxed as he saw it was only Sammy.

And in that moment of relaxation he thought of something that could explain why Linder wasn't home yet. Just maybe Leon had decided to get into the poker game tonight—if he had and Joe had known it, he'd probably have joined the game too. He'd know that Dolly wouldn't be coming until a little while after Leon quit the game or the game broke up.

By playing in the game as long as Leon did, or a few minutes longer, he'd save himself the suspense of waiting for Dolly in the sleeping top. He'd know to look for her anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour after Leon left the game. And he could send Sammy to see who was in the poker game.

"Hi, Mr. Evans," Sammy said. "Can I look at pitchers?"

"Not tonight, Sammy. But listen, I want you to run an errand for me over to the G-top."

"Sure, Mr. Evans. I just come from there. Jesse's playing cards."

"Who else is playing?"

"Uh, let's see, there's Jesse and—uh, Mr. King and Mr.—I forget his name, the man who throws the knives."

"Quintana. Who else?"

"The man who runs the fish pond and—uh, Mr. Linder. That's all, I think."

Burt Evans took a deep breath of relief. "Wiggins wasn't there?"

"No, Mr. Evans."

"Okay, Sammy, then you won't have to go back there for me. I just wanted to send a message to him if he was playing. You run along now."

"Can't I *please* look at pitchers, Mr. Evans?"

"No."

"Aw gee, Mr. Evans, I won't bother you none. I'll just—"

Evans' hand lashed out and caught Sammy on the side of the face, a backhand blow. Not hard enough to hurt badly but the sting and the surprise made Sammy take a backward step and fall. He scrambled to his feet and ran toward the midway.

Damn it, Evans thought, why

had he done a silly thing like that? He could have got rid of Sammy without hitting him. Now Sammy might go squawking to Jesse and—oh hell, Jesse wouldn't take trouble over a little thing like that. And if Jesse did come to him he'd just tell Jesse about Sammy getting into those pornography books. Then Jesse would beat the hell out of Sammy himself.

Now that he remembered that, Sammy really had had that sock coming. Just the same, hitting Sammy worried him because it showed how tense he was inside. He'd better start calming down and controlling himself before he made a real mistake.

He went back inside the trailer and resumed his vigil from the window. Joe Linder came back to his sleeping top at about half past one. Dolly came and joined him at two o'clock.

Give them half an hour, he decided. Surely she wouldn't leave before then. Then too they might talk a while first or Dolly might play the old game of pretending reluctance and it was better that Leon catch them in the act. Besides—hell, give them half an hour. It made him feel better about what he had to do.

He checked himself while he waited. He had the razor blade. He had his gun in case anything went wrong. He was wearing crêpe-soled shoes that let him walk silently. And the car was ready for a quick getaway if necessary.

Then it was two-thirty, on the head. Evans left the trailer and went around behind the tops until he found the freak show top and the corner of it Quintana partitioned off for sleeping quarters.

He looked around carefully and then took out the razor blade and made a six-inch slit in the canvas. He held the slit open a little and put his eye to it. He could see perfectly—an all-night bulb in the main part of the top threw dim light over Quintana's partition. He could see the bedding, Quintana sleeping on it, lying on his back. And not doped unless a few drops of plain water in his whiskey nightcap had doped him.

He made his voice sepulchral. "Leon Quintana." No movement. He said it again, just a trifle louder. He saw Quintana's head rise.

Quickly now, before he was thoroughly awake. "Your wife is with Joe Linder, in Joe's top."

Quintana was sitting up fast now, turning to look at Dolly's empty side of the bedding. Evans got away from there quickly and silently, back to his own trailer.

He barely had time to get to the window before Quintana was in sight, running. He wore only a pair of shorts but he had two knives—cutting knives, not throwing knives, one in each hand, held as a knife fighter holds them. He shouldered his way through the flap of Joe Linder's top and there was a yell and a scream.

Evans shuddered.

Dr. Magus woke to hangover again. But he remembered that today he was going to Glenrock. For forty-two thousand excellent reasons. The thought of going anywhere made him groan but he struggled into clothes—any old clothes until he had a pick-up shot, coffee and breakfast. After that he'd dress for the trip.

He had the pick-up shot inside him when a voice from outside called, "Hey, Doc, you home?"

"I'm beginning to think so. Come on in."

It was Showalter, the lieutenant. He looked at Dr. Magus. "Doc, do you feel as bad as you look?"

"I do not know how I look and do not tell me, please."

"All right. Listen, Doc, I'm looking for a witness or two to what happened last night. Were you one of the first ones there?"

"One of the first ones where? What happened last night?"

"Dolly Quintana and Joe Linder —Leon Quintana caught them in bed together in Linder's tent and killed both of them."

Dr. Magus swore luridly and at length. "Have you got Quintana?" he asked.

"Sure, and a confession and everything. He didn't even try to get away, just sat there in his shorts, bawling. We got him all right—I'm trying, though, to find some of the people who heard the screams and got there right away—just for the record or in case Quintana might try to repudiate that confession."

"Afraid I can't help you, Lieutenant. I didn't hear a thing. Probably wouldn't have even if I'd been awake. Joe Linder's top is way across the midway from here. I woke up just now, was just getting set to go out for breakfast."

"You look like you need it, Doc. I won't keep you from it. Or come to think of it I'll go with you and have some coffee." He grinned. "I had my breakfast five hours ago."

In the chow top after his first cup of coffee, Dr. Magus felt a little better. He asked, "Anything new on the Irby business?"

"Forgot to mention it," the lieutenant told him. "That's washed up too. Quintana did it. We found Irby's money in Quintana's trunk, stuffed inside an old cornet."

Dr. Magus looked surprised. "I'll be damned," he said. "I can see Leon committing a crime of passion—but that Irby deal—Has Leon confessed it?"

"No—denies it. But that's logical enough—he probably figured he may get life instead of the hot squat on a *flagrante delicto* kill in hot blood but that he'd get the chair for sure on a cold-blooded murder for money."

"I still can't see him killing Irby, Lieutenant. That really surprises me."

The lieutenant shrugged. "No doubt about it. It *was* Irby's money. Not only just about the amount we

figured—two hundred forty—two hundred of it in brand new twenties with consecutive serial numbers. We were keeping this back before, but we learned at the Glenrock bank that Irby had asked for two hundred cash he took out of the check in twenties. They gave them to him from a stack of new ones fresh from the printing office."

"Sounds as though he did it, all right. Well, I've been wrong about people before. A few times."

"Another reason, Doc, why I figured he wouldn't confess to the Irby kill. He's getting set to try an insanity plea. Here's his story of how he knew where Dolly was—claims he heard a voice in his sleep!"

Another cop, a uniformed one, stood in the entrance of the chow top, looking around. He saw Showalter and came over.

"Captain just phoned," he said. "Quintana just killed himself in jail. Know how? *Bit* through the vein in one of his wrists and let himself bleed to death before they found him. Imagine a guy doing that. Cap said to tell you to come on in, no use looking for witnesses any more."

Dr. Magus was glad he'd finished his breakfast. He felt a little sick as he walked back to the mitt camp.

Burt Evans felt lousy too but for a different reason. He was nervous, keyed-up, jittery—and worried that he felt that way for no reason at all. All his problems were solved and he should be feeling wonderful. Everything had worked out better than he'd dared hope.

The cops had even written off Mack Irby's murder and wouldn't investigate any further. What a brilliant idea it had been, after all, to give that money to Dolly! Almost as brilliant as his master stroke of eliminating Dolly, the only witness against him, by letting somebody else kill her.

And he'd had luck too—Quintana's committing suicide in jail, especially, so he couldn't keep on denying having killed Irby. Maybe if he'd kept on denying it they'd have started believing him after a while and reopened the investigation.

Now nobody living knew Quintana hadn't killed Irby. And nobody living even suspected the money existed.

Then why was he feeling lousy today? Conscience? Hell, he didn't have any conscience. Of course a good drunk would help him—a knock-down drag-out two-week's drunk—but that would have to wait a week or so until the season was over, until he had that money in a really safe place.

My God the things he could do after that! Hundred-dollar-a-night women any time he wanted them . . .

Suddenly, realizing something, he started to laugh.

That was what was wrong with him! He hadn't had a woman for over six weeks now, since he'd found the money. Hadn't even thought about it!

Why couldn't he have, say, Trixie over tonight to spend the night with him? No reason at all—true, he didn't want to start spending money on the grand scale until he was somewhere else but that didn't mean he had to live now a more celebate life than he had before he'd found that dough. It wouldn't be acting suddenly prosperous for him to have a woman tonight and a couple of other nights before the big spending could start.

Naturally he was jittery and nervous. But twenty bucks would cure what ailed him.

Burt strolled over to the model show top. He went back inside and called out Trixie's name. She came under the canvas partition that shut off the dressing space.

"Hi," she said. "Haven't seen you for a long time."

"Too long." He dropped his voice. "Busy tonight?"

"Well—I promised someone I'd see him right after we close, but it's not an all-night date. I'll be free by one o'clock."

"Swell, honey. Drop around to the trailer after that. And don't make any other late dates, huh?"

VII

The receptionist at the Glenrock Memorial Hospital checked the card file and told Dr. Magus that she was sorry but the doctor who had treated his son—Dr. Kramer, he'd been the resident physician then—was no longer with them. He'd left only last week to take a position on the staff of Misericordia Hospital in Milwaukee. He could be reached there.

Dr. Magus sighed. "Perhaps I might talk to whichever of the nurses would remember him best?"

"I don't know which one that would be, sir. Maybe you'd better talk to our head nurse, Miss Plackett. She isn't on duty now but she stays here and I think she's in her room."

A few minutes later Dr. Magus was talking to Miss Plackett.

Sharp eyes, sharp nose, sharp manner and tough, no doubt, to work for but, he decided, soft as butter inside. She wasn't in uniform—she wore a navy blue suit.

"Miss Plackett," Dr. Magus said, "I am Dr. Rance Irby. My son, MacGregor Irby—I understand he used the name of Mack Irby—spent seven weeks here, up to last Monday afternoon, with a broken leg and other and lesser injuries. Which of your nurses, may I ask, would be most familiar with the case?"

"I believe I myself would, Dr. Irby. I helped Dr. Kramer the night Mr. Irby was brought in and I am familiar with the progress of the case up to the time of his release. What is it you wish to know?"

Dr. Magus sighed. "Many *little* things, Miss Plackett. Not medical details or anything that could be considered confidential. Perhaps—ah—do you know my son is dead?"

"I know the police came here a few days ago and asked questions

about him. They didn't tell us why."

"He was killed—murdered for money he had on him—only hours after he left here. He returned to the carnival he worked for and met his death there that same night."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Doctor." She wasn't really. But she would be after he got into the song and dance he hadn't started yet.

He said, "Thank you. Miss Plackett, I'm sure you'll be better able to help me if I explain fully what my problem is—and it's almost impossible to make that particular long story short. I wonder ... Will you forgive me if I ask you to have dinner with me? It will give us time to talk at leisure."

She declined but not too firmly. They went to a "nice" restaurant only a block from the hospital and he was pleasantly surprised to be able to talk her into a cocktail before dinner.

"I should explain, Miss Plackett, that I am not a doctor of medicine. My doctorate is in philosophy. I am a professor of psychology at U. S. C." He shook his head ruefully. "A psychologist in the eyes of the world but not my own—not until I learn wherein I failed with my own son."

"What do you mean, Dr. Irby?"

"MacGregor ran away from home eleven years ago at the age of eighteen, just out of high school. I have not seen him since nor heard of or from him until yesterday, despite all my efforts to find him. Yesterday I was told of his death, and the circumstances surrounding it, by the Los Angeles Police Department."

"But how did they know to notify you? I mean, if he'd changed his name and—"

"Fingerprints, taken as a matter of police routine after his death. Sent to Washington and found to be those of my son—on record because he'd been arrested during the last year he was living at home.

"I came immediately. Rather, I should say, I started immediately by plane to Bloomfield, to the carnival, but since Glenrock was on my way there, I decided to stop here first to see what I could learn here."

"But I don't quite see what I can tell you . . ."

"I'll try to explain. It's not my son's murder I'm interested in—I understand that his murderer has already been apprehended and that there is no mystery. But there is a mystery, a major mystery, in my son's *life*. Until he was fourteen MacGregor was a normal happy boy, mentally healthy.

"Something happened then—or he had a delayed reaction to something that happened sooner—that changed him. He began to rebel. He began to steal and—to do other things. When I tried to talk to him he was sullen and defiant. He grew farther and farther away from me. And at eighteen he ran away from home. Ever since, I've tried to trace him. Now do you begin to see, Miss

Plackett, what it is that I must learn?"

"Why—not exactly."

"I want to know, I must learn, where I made my mistake in dealing with my son, what happened to him inside. Apart from parental love there is the fact that I am supposed to be a psychologist. God help me, the university has been wanting me to conduct a seminar in child guidance.

"How can I and be honest when I don't know where I went wrong in guiding my own son? It's too late to help MacGregor now but for the sake of my own conscience and my integrity as a teacher I must learn the answer."

Dr. Magus took a deep breath. He was hitting his stride now, beginning to feel the rôle he was playing. And he had his audience. Miss Plackett's nose was still sharp but her eyes weren't.

He said, "How long it takes me doesn't matter. I've arranged for indefinite leave. If necessary I'll find and talk to every friend he had, every woman he knew. I'll trace back places where he lived and worked until I find the answer. Somewhere, sometime, he told somebody something—consciously or unconsciously—that will tell me what I want to know."

"I understand now, Doctor. How can I help you?"

"Thank you, Miss Plackett. What, specifically, do I want to know?" He gestured helplessly. "I don't *know* what you might be able to tell me that might help. Just tell me every slight detail that you remember about him. His personality, his attitudes—anything and everything you can tell me about his stay with you.

"Especially things that would give me leads to other people who might tell me things. Telephone calls he made or received, if any. Incoming and outgoing correspondence. Anything, everything that you remember about him."

Miss Plackett talked. She talked all through dinner.

And said nothing helpful to Dr. Magus.

It was over dessert that he thought of and asked the right question. "Ah—Miss Plackett, was his leg set under a general or a local anesthetic?"

"A general, administered intravenously—sodium pentathol."

"People often talk deliriously when they are coming out of anesthesia. Usually nonsense, of course. But sometimes such nonsense as can come from things that are deep in their subconscious minds, things that are desperately important to them."

"Yes, Doctor. And Mr. Irby did rave a bit when he was coming out—but I'm afraid that to me it was all pure nonsense and that I don't remember a word of it."

Dr. Magus leaned earnestly forward. "Will you try hard to remember, my dear?"

"I'll try my best." She thought hard. "Some of it was swearing—

I remember the word 'Jeez,' a corruption of 'Jesus' I suppose. That and a number—but I can't remember the number."

Dr. Magus took a deep breath. He said, "I punished him once when he was about six for using that very word. I wonder . . . The punishment was that I temporarily deprived him of his toy soldiers. There were, I believe—ah—forty-two of them."

"That's the number, Doctor! He'd say, 'Forty-two, Jeez!' and then laugh. He said that several times. And there was another phrase . . ."

She stared into space. Dr. Magus didn't move a muscle.

"Something about pickles," she said. "No, it was pickle punks or pickled punks. And something about 'it'—whatever 'it' was—being stuffed inside a two-headed calf."

Dr. Magus' smile was beautiful.

Sammy wandered lonely as a cloud. It was late and the carny had long since closed but Jesse was playing poker again and Sammy wasn't sleepy. He wanted to find someone to talk to.

Even more, he wanted again to see those pictures of naked men and women doing things. If only Mr. Evans wasn't mad at him! But he was and now he was afraid of Mr. Evans. Mr. Evans would hit him again if he even asked to see pictures, even just pictures in magazines, ordinary pictures.

Or if there was only some way he could get some money, big money, folding money, so he could give it to Miss Trixie, like Mr. King had suggested, so she'd show him those things the men and women in the book did, actually do them with him. But where and how would he ever get folding money?

He walked toward the G-top to make sure Jesse was still playing cards and that it was still all right for him to wander. He looked through the flap and Jesse was still in the game.

When he turned away he saw Miss Trixie. She was already past him and walking fast. She went toward the trailer, Mr. Evans' trailer. She knocked and the door opened and she went in.

Just a few days ago Sammy would have thought she was going there just to talk to Mr. Evans. But Sammy had learned a lot from those pictures and from what Mr. King had told him about Miss Trixie. He knew about women now and he knew why Miss Trixie was going to see Mr. Evans. Or he was pretty sure anyway.

He wondered if they'd let him watch. That would be better than looking at the pictures again. But then he remembered that Mr. Evans was mad at him and had hit him and that he didn't dare even ask Mr. Evans for anything again.

But the shade on one of the windows of the trailer wasn't pulled all the way down—he could see a crack of light between it and

the bottom of the window. Maybe he could see through and watch and Mr. Evans wouldn't know.

Sammy tiptoed over. He hoped he wouldn't have to stand there too long because the night had turned chilly and he was shivering.

He had to bend down a little to put his eyes to the crack. At first all he saw was the edge of the bunk and the wall past it. Then Miss Trixie walked into view. She still had her clothes on except for the coat she'd been wearing. At his angle of vision he could see only from her knees to her breasts. Then she sat down on the bunk, facing his way, and he could see her face too.

Then Mr. Evans came. He was still dressed too, mostly. He had a drink in each hand—he handed one to Miss Trixie and sat down beside her.

Sammy shivered again and wondered if he should go back and get his jacket. But he might miss something if he did.

Mr. Evans moved farther back on the bunk, leaning against the wall. He held his drink in his left hand and his right hand reached behind Miss Trixie and Sammy could tell he was unbuttoning buttons. Then his hand pulled her back to lean against him and slid around her neck and down inside the front of her dress.

Suddenly Sammy sneezed. The sneeze was loud and it was so unexpected that it made his head jerk forward. His forehead hit the window with a resounding thump.

He turned and ran for the concealing shadow of the G-top but he'd taken only a few steps when he heard the door jerk open behind him and knew that Mr. Evans was seeing him run, recognizing him even from behind at so short a distance in the moonlight.

But no footsteps came running after him and he paused and looked back when he reached the shadows. Hadn't Mr. Evans minded after all?

But while he was wondering the door of the trailer opened again and Mr. Evans came out. He'd put on more clothes. He started walking but not toward Sammy. Sammy could see he was heading around for the other side of the gambling top, where the entrance was. He was going to tell Jesse on Sammy.

How mad would Jesse be? How bad a thing had Sammy done? Maybe an awfully bad one. He turned and ran for Jesse's sleeping top. He'd better be there when Jesse came.

Inside he found the little carbide lantern and got it lighted. He put on his jacket and sat waiting. He didn't dare undress and get in the bedding because if he was naked Jesse's blows would hurt worse if Jesse was going to beat him.

Finally Jesse came. He crawled through the flap and stood up just inside, his head bent to clear the canvas, looking down at Sammy. He was sober but his eyes were cold and hard.

"Get out," he said. "Get off the lot and keep going. I'm through with you."

Sammy whimpered. Jesse couldn't really be sending him away for good. That meant hunger and wandering until the police picked him up and put him back in a *place* again.

Jesse said, "Get going. I mean it. I wasn't going to feed you all winter anyhow and it might's well be now as end of season. Get going." He took off his belt and held it ready to swing. Buckle end down.

Sammy looked at the buckle and whimpered again. Then he crawled out through the tent flap past Jesse. Out into the night, the lonely night bright with moonlight and dark with dread.

VIII

Saturday morning. Dr. Magus woke early, for him, at nine o'clock, knowing he had a big day ahead of him. He'd better operate the mitt camp, for one thing, lest people start wondering why he was working so little.

And there were preparations to be made, none of them difficult but all of them important.

Most important would be getting rid of Barney King tonight for a couple of hours after the show closed. Barney King slept on a bedroll in the unborn show top. He had to get rid of Barney so he could get the two-headed calf foetus, get the forty-two thousand dollars out of it, and get it back to the unborn show.

Last night after he got back from Glenrock, he'd seen that Barney King was playing cards and he'd taken the slight risk of spending a few minutes with a flashlight in the unborn show top. He'd given the jar and the foetus a quick but careful examination.

The jar was a wide-mouthed five-gallon jar. Pretty heavy but he could manage to get it from the unborn show to the mitt camp and back again. Then he'd want an empty cardboard carton to carry it in and rope to rope the carton shut and to carry it by.

Razor blades he had plenty of. But he'd need rubber cement to close the cut he'd have to make to get the money out of the hollow rubber foetus—it was rubber, all right. His examination of it through the glass had convinced him of that.

After they'd put the money inside the foetus Charlie and Mack would have sealed it again, not only to keep the money dry but because water getting in would lower the level of water in the jar and show evidence of tampering. He'd need rubber cement to reseal it for the same reason. He'd go off the lot this morning and get a carton, rope, rubber cement. So much for means.

For opportunity he had to think out a song and dance that would get Barney King off the lot at least two hours. He *might* be able to do the whole operation in half an hour

but he'd better not count on it. Furthermore he very much wanted those two hours to be tonight. Tomorrow night there'd be no chance. Tomorrow night was Sunday night and tear-down—packing and moving would start even before the carnival closed. He'd worry about the jar being lost or broken in the move to the next town and besides the suspense of waiting at least two more nights would be horrible.

He did his errands, put the things he'd bought in the mitt camp and went to see Barney King.

"Your jalopy still running, Barney? Wonder if you could do me a hell of a favor with it tonight after the carney closes. It'll be a drive of about forty miles each way but I'll gladly give you twenty bucks besides your gasoline and any other expenses."

"A double sawbuck I can use, Doc. What's the pitch."

"Telegram from my brother. He's coming in on a plane tonight, some family business, wants me to meet a one-forty plane at the Springer Airport—guess Bloomfield hasn't got one or else he couldn't get a flight into it.

"I can't even go with you—I got a big deal on tonight that's going to make me a flat hundred bucks—Dame I gave a reading wants a private seance in her house on the anniversary of her husband's death, so it's got to be tonight. So I'll be money ahead to pay you to meet my brother."

"Sure, Doc. Don't blame you. How'll I know your brother, though, and what's his name."

"You'll know him because he looks a lot like me. But don't be surprised, Barney, if he doesn't show up on the plane. He's pretty unpredictable and if he sent me that telegram and then changed his mind about coming, it wouldn't surprise me. But I've got to have him met if he does come." Dr. Magus pulled out his wallet. "I'll give you the money now, Barney. And oh yes, his name. His name is Legion—Harry J. Legion."

Sammy was hungry. He'd been hiding from Jesse all day and it was late at night again now and the carnival was closing. But Jesse hadn't seen him and he was still all right—except that he was *awful* hungry. Most of the day he'd spent hiding under bally platforms.

Once, in the middle of the afternoon, he'd taken the chance of coming out and walking around—well away from Jesse's booth—long enough to get one errand to run for Dr. Magus, just a short errand that got him a quarter, enough to buy one hamburger sandwich.

But that was all he'd had to eat all day. And if he waited any longer in hiding even the chow top might be closed and he couldn't get anything to eat even if somebody did give him an errand to run.

So he took the risk again and crept out from under the bally platform of the freak show, onto the midway. He'd have to take a

chance now, with the carney partly closed already, or it would be too late and he might starve to death and die. And that would spoil his plan.

He'd figured out his plan last night after Jesse had kicked him out. He'd crawled inside one of the trucks and had slept there but before he slept he figured out his plan. He had to stay on the lot, because if he got away from it he might not ever be able to find his way back, so he'd have to stay on the lot but hide from Jesse.

Tomorrow night the carney would move and he'd move with it in one of the trucks but still hiding from Jesse. And in the new town, on a new day, he'd go to Jesse and by that time Jesse would be over being mad at him and would take him back and everything would be all right again.

He'd say, "Sammy, I'm sorry. I thought I'd lost you." At least he could hope Jesse would.

As he walked along the almost deserted midway now he thought how much he hated Mr. Evans for telling on him. It was all Mr. Evans' fault, what had happened to him. Mr. Evans could just have told him not to look into a window, without telling Jesse on him. It was Mr. Evans' fault that he was hungry now. He wandered toward the chow top. It was still open, brightly lighted. He could smell food, frying hamburgers. His stomach hurt.

Suddenly a hand closed around his arm, tight, squeezing hard. It was Jesse. Jesse had seen him from behind and had come up.

Jesse's grip hurt and his eyes frightened Sammy. Jesse said, "I told you not to hang around here, didn't I? Hit the road."

"But Jesse—"

"Get off this lot tonight. God damn you, if I see you again after tonight I'll half kill you! Hit the road—tracks are over that way."

Jesse let go and jerked his thumb to show which way the tracks were and as though on cue a freight engine whistled mournfully in the night far away. Jesse walked on past him and went in the chow top.

Sammy stood there. His plan had failed. And, he sav now, not just because Jesse had found him too soon. Jesse really meant it and wouldn't change, wouldn't ever take him back. And Jesse really would half kill him if he saw him again—he'd meant that too. He had to go, had to hit the road, tonight, now, hungry.

He started in the direction Jesse's thumb had pointed, the direction of the tracks. He found himself cutting off the midway next to the G-top, and he stopped because if he went back that way he'd have to go past Mr. Evans' trailer. But he started walking again—why shouldn't he go past? Mr. Evans wouldn't hit him for just walking past.

Mr. Evans' trailer was dark and it was too early for him to have gone to bed. He wasn't there.

Sammy looked at the trailer and his mouth began to water as he remembered that Mr. Evans had a little refrigerator in the trailer and kept food there. Sometimes he made a meal for himself instead of eating at the chow top.

Food. The all-night walk ahead of him would be easy if he could fill his stomach first or find food to take along. He got up his courage and knocked on the door to be *sure* Mr. Evans wasn't there. Again louder—no answer. He was sure now and he tried the door. It was locked but now that he knew no one was inside the pain in his stomach wasn't going to let that stop him.

He threw his shoulder against the door, then harder and again and the door burst open inward. He went in quickly and shut it, then turned on the lights. But the door wanted to swing open now that the lock was broken and he had to put a chair against it. He pulled down the shades so nobody could see him if they went by.

In the refrigerator he found a box of marshmallow cookies and stuffed one in his mouth right away. He could eat them while he looked for more food. There wasn't much more, but in a compartment over the refrigerator he found a box of crackers and the heel of a loaf of bread.

He was starting out with them when he remembered the books. Since he was stealing from Mr. Evans anyway and since he hated Mr. Evans too, why shouldn't he take at least one of those books along so he could look at it all he wanted to? At least the one book that was all pictures, photographs, no printing at all? It would serve Mr. Evans right if he took that too.

But the books weren't in the compartment where they'd been. Mr. Evans had moved them somewhere else or maybe hidden them to keep him from finding them if he came back. He put down the bread and crackers and started looking in other compartments and cabinets and places but he didn't find the books.

He looked under the bunk and there was a suitcase and he pulled it out. Mr. Evans could have put the books in the suitcase. It was locked but he got a hammer he'd just seen in a compartment he'd looked in and broke the lock. That would serve Mr. Evans right too.

He opened the suitcase and on top was a gun, a revolver. He picked it up and it felt nice and heavy in his hand. He'd take that too and then he wouldn't have to be afraid of anybody. He knew how to use it because the man at the shooting gallery had showed him how only a week ago.

He'd run an errand and instead of paying him in money the man had let him shoot a rifle a few times and a revolver like this one a few times. He hadn't hit anything with it but he knew how to shoot it all right. All you had to do was pull back the hammer with your thumb

and then pull the trigger with your finger and it would shoot. He put the gun in his pocket and turned back to the suitcase.

There was a knock on the door. Sammy whirled around, his hand going into his pocket and closing around the butt of the revolver, ready to pull it out and shoot if anyone came in.

Ten minutes earlier, Dr. Magus, from the point of vantage he'd taken for the purpose, had seen Barney King drive away and had sighed with relief.

Now, back in the mitt camp, with the jar that held the foetus that held the money on the ground before him, he sighed again and more deeply.

No one had seen him carrying it around behind the tops. His luck had been in, as it had been all along. God what a break he'd got at Glenrock—that wonderful head nurse remembering and telling him what Mack Irby had said coming out of the anesthetic. Thinking Mack had said *forty-two, Jeez,* instead of *forty-two G's*—and then incredibly remembering and telling him its exact hiding place!

Here it was in front of him and he had lots of time, plenty of time. Why not take a drink now to celebrate? Just one drink now. More later, of course, after the money was in his foot locker and the pickled punk was back in the unborn show. But one now—he very carefully had not taken a single drink all day and one drink now before he started would make his hands steadier.

He poured a drink into a glass, a measured drink. He couldn't drink from the bottle on an occasion like this. He raised the glass to his lips and sipped, dreaming.

That wonderful moolah, only inches and minutes away. Savor this moment, he told himself. This fleeting instant, this *now,* this anticipation—prolong and enjoy it. Not even the money itself could buy such moments as this.

IX

After a while, after a long while, Sammy decided that whoever had knocked had gone away. And he was glad because he hadn't really wanted to have to kill anybody, not even Mr. Evans.

He took his hand from the butt of the gun and turned to the suitcase again. Maybe the books were under the clothes. He threw clothes out of the suitcase with both hands but the books weren't there.

There was a shoe-box, though, and when he picked it up he knew from the weight of it that it held something other than a pair of shoes. He took off the lid.

He stared unbelievingly into the box. It was money, paper money, in neat stacks. Some of it in packages with paper bands around them, some of it loose. He hadn't thought there was that much paper money in the whole world. It must be an *awful* lot of money. It must be a

million dollars, enough to buy anything.

Dr. Magus had been right—Sammy was rich!

Why he could go to Trixie right now, tonight, if he could find her. And give her a handful of this money and . . .

He put the lid back on the box and stood up quickly, putting it under his arm and going out the door. He didn't have to bother with the food now—he could buy all the food he wanted. With this money and the gun to protect it he could have *anything* he wanted.

Straight down the midway Sammy marched, one hand on the gun, the box under his other arm, not caring now whom he met, even Jesse or Mr. Evans. If he met either of them he'd just point the gun and tell him to go away. Straight toward the model show top he went. If Miss Trixie wasn't there he'd find her no matter where she was.

Trixie Connor put the final touches on her lipstick, standing close to the full-length mirror in the dressing room of the model show. She looked all right, she decided. She had a late date with a mark, a townie, who'd been pestering her with notes all week. She'd decided she could take him for plenty, a hundred bucks if he wanted her to spend all night with him.

She looked at her watch and saw it was time to go. He was going to be waiting in his car over on the McClelland Street side of the lot and he was there now.

She turned out the light, then walked out past the bally platform to the midway.

A voice called her name and she stopped and turned. It was only Sammy, poor halfwitted Sammy, coming toward her, almost running. He had a shoe-box under his arm and he looked excited.

"Miss Trixie! I was just coming for you. I want—"

"Sorry, Sammy, I'm in a hurry now. Whatever it is, ask me tomorrow." She started walking but he fell in beside her. She stopped to tell him not to but he stopped too and he had already opened the shoebox and was reaching inside it. He brought out a handful of something and . . .

God, it was *money!* They were right under a light bulb. She could see it plainly and she couldn't be wrong. He was holding out to her a handful of twenty and fifty-dollar bills. A *handful* of them—there must be almost a thousand dollars right there in Sammy's hand.

She reached out and grabbed the bills—Sammy's fingers released them without a struggle. The quickest glance at the money showed her it was real, not stage money or queer—the bills were all worn ones and they looked right and felt right. She quickly stuffed them into her handbag.

"Sammy, where did you get that money?"

He grinned at her. "I found it, Miss Trixie."

"Let me see that box!" She clutched at it but Sammy held onto it firmly. He was stronger than she.

He said, "I'll let you *see,* Miss Trixie. But it's mine." As she let go he took off the lid and let her look. The light overhead threw light into the box. Trixie gasped.

"Sammy, does anyone know you've . . ." She stopped, realizing that the question was absurd. If anyone knew Sammy had that money he wouldn't have it.

Her mind clicked into overdrive. She did what she should have done a full minute ago—she looked around to be sure no one was watching them and then pulled Sammy back into the shadows between two tops, off the midway and out of the light.

She didn't waste time wondering *where* Sammy had found the money. The thing was to get it from him and she tried the simplest thing first. She put her arms around his neck and pressed herself against him. "Sammy, want to go to bed with me? And have fun?"

"Gee, sure, Miss Trixie. That's what I gave you money for."

"All right. We'll go to a hotel downtown but first let's go back to my place and get a suitcase. We can get in a hotel easier if we've got one. And you can put that box in it so nobody'll see it."

Throwing clothes into the suitcase to fill it, Trixie thought furiously. Let him carry it so he wouldn't be suspicious.

The bottle of whisky—put it in so they could have a drink before they went to bed. And thank God for that little bottle of chloral hydrate she had. She popped it into her purse. She'd get that into the drink she'd offer him and—well, an hour or two after that Trixie Connor would be getting out of Bloomfield on the next plane, train, bus or whatever went out first. And keep going far and fast.

"You carry the suitcase, Sammy. Come on. Let's go."

Evans looked up from the card table as a hand fell on his shoulder. It was Wiggins. He said, "Hi. Did you know you left the light on in your trailer?"

"When? Just now?" He hadn't left the light on—he was certain of it. Since that time Sammy had walked in uninvited he'd been very careful with the lights and the lock.

"Ten-fifteen minutes ago. I went by and knocked when I saw a crack of light at one of the shades."

Evans tried to keep his face from showing fear, tried to act casual. But he didn't waste any time in throwing in his cards and standing up. He said, "I'd better go check up. Back in a minute."

He walked until he was outside the G-top but broke into a run the second he was outside and saw that not only was the light on but the door was now ajar.

The lock was broken. The suitcase was on the floor, empty. The money was gone. So was the gun.

Blankly, unbelievingly, he looked around. The food out of the refrigerator and cupboard, the empty box that had held cookies . . .

Sammy!

Only Sammy would have broken in to look for food, only Sammy would have eaten cookies while he searched the rest of the trailer. Sammy on the lam—Jesse had said something about kicking Sammy out.

Sammy must have left after Wiggins had been here and knocked because the door couldn't have been ajar then. So Sammy had left only ten or fifteen minutes ago. He might still be on the lot—he couldn't be far away.

Evans rushed out, not bothering with the door or the lights. They didn't matter now and every second might count.

On the midway he stopped, looking frantically around for someone, anyone, who might have seen Sammy, might be able to tell him which way Sammy had gone.

He ran for the chow top, seeing it was still lighted. In the entrance he almost ran into Dixie Weber. "Seen Sammy?" he asked.

"You mean Rau's boy? Yeah, just a few minutes ago."

He tried to make his voice sound calm. "Where? Which way was he going?"

"Toward the main gate. He was with Trixie Connor, carrying a suitcase for her."

"Did they have a taxi waiting?"

Dixie shrugged. "I just saw 'em going through the gate."

He gasped thanks and started that way, then whirled and ran for his car instead. Thank God it wasn't hitched to the trailer. He'd have a better chance in it than afoot. Even if they'd had a cab waiting or had been lucky enough to flag one down already, even if a bus had gone by, he might still be able to catch them if he was in his car.

Dr. Magus shifted the shielded flashlight and looked again to be sure. Yes, the line was faint but unmistakable. The rubber punk had been cleverly cut along the fold under the shoulder so the cut couldn't possibly be seen through the glass of the jar.

He picked up the single-edged razor blade and ran it lightly along the line, then a little harder. It was merely cemented shut with rubber cement, such as he himself had ready to use to close it again. The cut opened.

He dropped the blade and reached his fingers in eagerly through the cut. He touched paper, the crisp wonderful paper of United States currency.

This was the moment of moments. He sighed deeply with satisfaction, realising now how tense he had just been, realising that until now, until the very instant, despite

all evidence, he had doubted that fate could be so kind to one so undeserving.

Curiously the bills seemed to be tied together and to be tied to something. He pulled.

There was a flash . . .

X

Weep no tears for Dr. Magus. He died the best of deaths. He died without even hearing the sound of the explosion that killed him, died so suddenly that there was no time for either pain or realization. He died without *knowing* that he died, and in a moment of supreme satisfaction and happiness. What more could he have asked or wanted?

Weep rather for Burt Evans, owner of the unborn show, the murderer now of five people if one counts Leon Quintana, and all for a shoe-box full of money that he now no longer had.

Through the windshield of his car, as he stepped on its starter, he saw the flash, as Dr. Magus had seen it in the crystal ball, but he heard the explosion too. He saw the canvas of the mitt camp billow outward and tear.

In his travail he thought, oh God what now? Had that been the booby trap he'd put inside the rubber calf foetus, the booby trap that had been for Mack Irby in case Mack got back from the hospital unexpectedly and got to the foetus to take the money from it before he could get to Mack and kill him?

It must have been. Somehow Doc Magus had got on the trail of that money and had learned where it was hidden. Rather, where it had been hidden before he'd found it and put it in the shoe-box in his suitcase. But how the *hell* could Doc have learned about it?

Well, that didn't matter now. The whole thing was tumbling down around his ears and now he'd have to keep going, on the lam, whether or not he caught up with Sammy and Trixie and the money.

The whole thing would come out now when the police got Sammy and Trixie—and the police would. Trixie was no doubt going to ditch Sammy so the police would have Sammy's story in any case. And they'd get Trixie too in the end—she wasn't smart enough to stay clear of them.

Yes—win, lose or draw in regard to catching up with Sammy and Trixie—he had to keep going now. And unless he got the money back he'd have lost everything. His unborn show, his own money—in the bank but he'd never dare show to try to draw it out—his trailer, even his clothes except the ones he was wearing. He didn't even have much cash on him—most of it had been in chips in that poker game he'd never go back to.

The engine was running now. He jerked the car viciously into gear, turned on the lights and started, circling off to the other side of the lot, away from the center of excitement where the mitt camp had been.

God, how suddenly everything had gone wrong! Sammy raiding the trailer and finding the money. How could he have forseen that? Or Doc Magus opening the booby-trapped punk.

It had all gone so perfectly till now, from the time he'd found the money. It had been a few days after the accident that had killed Charlie and hospitalized Mack. He'd noticed that the water level had gone down several inches in the jar that held the calf foetus so he knew it had sprung a slight leak.

When he took it out to fix the leak he'd found the cut Mack had made—and imperfectly sealed—and of course had looked inside and found the money. Wet, naturally—it had been a hell of a job getting it all dry while keeping it out of sight.

And while he waited for Mack to come back so he could kill him—(before Mack could find the money gone and kill *him*)—he'd worked out and set up the booby trap. And he'd stuck close to the lot so if it ever went off he could hear it and lam with the money before anybody figured what had happened. But things had gone well—he'd got Mack before Mack had a chance to try for the money.

Of course he could have taken the dynamite out any time since last Monday night but it would have been more dangerous to dismantle that bomb than it had been to set it. He'd figured simply to leave it there and after the end of the season bury the whole thing—jar and punk and booby trap all together. How in *hell* had Doc Magus . . . ?

He was off the lot now, on the street. He swung around the corner with tires screeching, then slowed down. If Trixie and Sammy were still waiting for a taxi or had started to walk, he didn't dare miss them. He forced himself to drive slowly for three blocks and then speeded up. When he'd gone six blocks, a third of the way into town, he knew they'd caught a cab and hit the floorboards with the accelerator pedal. The needle climbed to sixty and kept on climbing.

Then there was a car ahead that looked as though it could be a taxi. He didn't slow down. He swung out to cut around it and as he pulled level—going so fast the other car seemed almost to be standing still—he looked across into it. It was a *squad car*. Two startled faces under uniform caps looked at him.

"Pull over!"

He held his foot down and shot past them. Behind him their siren started to wail as they gathered speed. But his momentum had given him a full block lead. He *had* to get away from them.

A green light ahead turned red against him. He kept his foot down. But a car came out from the cross street—he had to swing the wheel hard to miss it. He missed it but

he swung too sharply. The world tilted, turned upside down—and ended in a scream of tearing metal.

Sammy put down the suitcase. Behind him he heard Miss Trixie slide home the bolt of the door. He turned to face her.

She looked eager and excited. He felt eager and excited himself. He took a step toward her but she smiled and put up a hand to hold him off.

"Honey, don't rush me. I want to get my breath. Ain't we got all night?"

She walked around him and put the suitcase down flat and opened it. Sammy thought maybe she was going to reach for the money and that was his so he moved over to stop her if she did. But she took out only the bottle.

"Sammy, I'll make us each a drink," she said. "Here's what let's do. I think you ought to take a bath before we go to bed. Will you do that, honey? Draw a nice tub of hot water and take yourself a good bath?"

"Sure, Miss Trixie."

"And I'll make us each a drink and get undressed and be in bed waiting for you. Oh—and close the bathroom door, will you? The sound of water running always makes me want to go."

"All right, Miss Trixie." Sammy started for the bathroom and then turned back. "Now Miss Trixie, you wouldn't run off with that money would you? It's *my* money."

She laughed. "I won't. Word of honor as a girl scout."

Sammy went into the bathroom and shut the door. He put the plug in the bathtub and started water running from both faucets. But he was still a little worried about the money. Miss Trixie was nice and he loved her but he remembered the look on her face when she'd first seen the money.

He happened to look up and saw that there was a transom above the bathroom door. The glass was the wavy kind you can't see through but it was open a little. There was a crack at the bottom. And there was a stool in the bathroom. He moved it over and stood on it and looked through the crack. If Miss Trixie really started to undress, then she wouldn't be running off with the money.

She was making the drinks. She'd already poured whisky into each of the two tumblers on the bureau. Now she had a little bottle from her purse and was putting something from it in one of the tumblers. She must be making something fancy for them to drink. Sammy knew people mixed things to make fancy drinks but he'd never had one. He'd tasted only whisky and beer.

He was gettting hot from steam coming up from the tub. He got down and turned the hot water partway off—he could tell now which was the hot water by feeling the faucet. Then he got back up on

the stool. Miss Trixie still hadn't started to undress.

She was kneeling in front of the suitcase, moving the clothes until the shoe-box showed. She picked it up and took the lid off, standing up now and looking in and reaching in to touch the money.

He didn't really mind her looking or touching—but what if looking and touching made her change her mind about running away while he was taking a bath? So she shouldn't do it. Maybe it would be a good idea to scare her so she wouldn't. He could scare her with the gun in his pocket and she wouldn't try to run away.

He took out the gun as he stepped down off the stool. He pulled back the hammer with his thumb, like the man had shown him. He opened the door.

Miss Trixie whirled and from the look on her face he knew she was scared all right. She backed away from him, and she dropped the box of money. The money came out and made a pile on the floor.

But he loved her and he didn't want to scare her *too* much. He said, "I ain't going to hurt you, Miss Trixie. I just want to show you that I—"

The gun went off in his hand.

Why, his finger had just been resting on the trigger—it hadn't been pulling hard.

But it went off. The noise it made was awful in that tiny room.

The look on Miss Trixie's face, though, was even more awful. And suddenly her head and shoulders bent forward and she fell down on the floor. She jerked once and rolled over, her head toward him. Sammy let the gun fall. He said, "I'm sorry, Miss Trixie—the gun just . . ."

She didn't move or answer. Maybe she'd been scared by the noise and had just fainted.

Sammy got down on the floor by her and put her head in his lap. He saw now that there was a spreading red spot on her dress right between her breasts. And suddenly a lot of blood came out of her mouth.

Sammy whimpered. Her face wasn't pretty any more and Sammy looked away from it. He saw Miss Trixie's purse where it had fallen too and spilled its contents. The handful of bills he had given her had come out of it and they were lying near the big pile of bills from the box. And a book of matches was lying there too.

There was hammering on the door of the room and yelling outside in the corridor and somebody trying the knob and somebody yelling to somebody else to call the police. Sammy was staring at the money and the matches and thinking that now Mr. Evans would get the money back, and he shouldn't and Sammy reaching for the matches and thinking that he could at least fix it so Mr. Evans wouldn't get the money back. Sammy was striking a match and lighting some money, and flames were getting higher and higher and brighter and brighter . . .

clean sweep

by . . . Cleve F. Adams

It's the gas chamber for killers in California—where no one but an occasional juror is ever hung.

SHANNON WAS HOLDING three aces, which is not a bad hand in anybody's poker game, but he was afraid of them. Trying to be very subtle he bet only two matches. He was indignant when the other four players tossed in their cards.

"Damn it," he said, if I'd bet the works you'd have laid down. I bet two lousy matches and you still lay down. What kind of a game is this, anyway?"

Icky Heiler, cut-rate bail-bond broker, giggled. "This game requires statesmanship. I never heard of a dick who had any, did you, Pete?"

Pete Cagliostro, who was killing time while the jury decided whether to hang his client or give him a citation, smiled sleepily. "Lieutenant Shannon has the kind of statesmanship that precipitates wars," he said.

Shannon may not have been a poker player but was far from being dumb. He sensed an underlying threat in Cagliostro's remark. It had been Shannon who put the pinch on Cagliostro's client.

"Meaning?" asked Shannon.

Cagliostro shrugged plump well-tailored shoulders. "Do I have to

A Hollywood scenarist once complained that the California climate was singularly rough on dogs and women. He might also have added that it seems to have a violent effect upon mystery writers. Such bellwethers of the hard-boiled school as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler may be accounted for by the meteorology of the West Coast. As, perhaps, is Cleve Adams, one of the best of this bloody atheneum.

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mean something every time I open my mouth?"

Icky Heiler giggled. Happy Boyle, horse-faced legman covering the trial for the *Courier*, said, "You usually do." Happy Boyle did not like Cagliostro very well.

The fifth man, also a reporter, said nothing at all. He was a comparative newcomer around Civic Center. His name was Walter Wheeler and he was definitely not the kind of man you called "Wheels"—ever. Shannon placed him as somewhere in his late thirties and envied him his clothes and his manner of wearing them. He worked for the *Mirror*, which was the most conservative sheet in town.

Aside from these five the press room was deserted. The jury had been out for almost two hours. It was six P.M.

Happy Boyle riffled the cards impatiently. "Well?"

"Count me out," Shannon said.

He stood up and went to the windows overlooking the Hall of Records and the new postoffice. He hoped they would give Muzzy Marcel the gas chamber.

Out in the corridor, past the open door of the press room, flowed a constant stream of people either going to or coming from the courtroom. Shannon, turning from the windows, saw Lieutenant Gus Vogel pause in the doorway.

Vogel was a round-bellied little Dutchman with the only derby in the whole department. He was Shannon's partner. He was accompanied by none other than Miss Frances McGowan.

Shannon frowned. "And what are you doing here?"

She pretended to be horrified. "You mean you're not glad to see me?"

Shannon grinned wolfishly, "Since you ask, no."

He was displeased with Miss McGowan. It wasn't bad enough for her to be a gal with such a perfectly formed body that various exclusive couturiers paid her more for wearing their gowns than an ungrateful city paid Shannon for catching murderers.

In addition to this she wrote—and sold—detective stories. It was in pursuit of material for this hobby of hers, or gift or whatever you wanted to call it, that she had met Shannon in the first place. These things weren't bad enough. Some ass had signed her up on the radio to tell the five-and-dime girls how, on thirty dollars a week, they could look as she did. It was enough to make John J. Shannon gnash his teeth. He scowled at Vogel.

"What's the idea?" he asked.

"Well," Vogel said doubtfully. "Well, now, John J., she said she had a date with you. I never caught her in no lie yet. At least, not in no direct lie. Maybe she skirts the edges, kind of."

Miss McGowan, apparently oblivious of this frank discussion, waved at someone inside the room. Shannon, pivoting, discovered Ca-

gliostro in the act of waving back.

"So you know that guy too!" he said.

"Of course," she said demurely, "I know all the best people. Are you going to take me to dinner or aren't you?"

Shannon remembered that he had promised to take her to dinner. "Maybe, after awhile," he said. "The jury ought to be in most any minute now."

Vogel said, "How'd it go, John J.?"

"Pretty good." Shannon's eyes glowed. "We've got him and once we get him we can get the guy he worked for." He cracked the knuckles of his left hand. "Bergdorf has been asking for it a long time."

Miss McGowan yawned daintily behind a small gloved hand. "Ten dollars Muzzy Marcel walks out from under."

Shannon glared. "I haven't got ten dollars!"

"Well, the dinner, then?"

He eyed her suspiciously. "I was going to buy you the dinner anyway."

She nodded. "But I wouldn't get to choose the place."

Shannon shrugged. "All right."

Frances looked at Vogel. "You heard that, Gus?"

"It was neat," Vogel said.

"Say, what is this?" Shannon said.

Again Miss McGowan yawned. "Oh, nothing much. It just happens that Bergdorf is giving a banquet tonight—for Muzzy Marcel."

Shannon laughed. "Baby, if he's throwing a party for that guy he'll have to throw it in jail!"

Half an hour later the jury brought in a verdict of justifiable homicide. Muzzy Marcel walked out a free man.

Shannon was still seething when he checked his hat and topcoat at the *Chez Dolphus* at a little before eight. Miss Frances McGowan, shedding a summer ermine cloak that would have set her escort back at least six months' salary, vanished in the direction of the powder room. She seemed in excellent spirits, as a girl who has had her own way.

There had been quite a scene in the courtroom. Ed Hull, the chief trial deputy, had said a lot of things he was probably going to be sorry for. Cagliostro had just sat there and let him say them, making it almost impossible for the court to rebuke the jury as the court had no doubt intended to do. For a judge of the superior court to say that here was evidence of a gross miscarriage of justice, after an assistant D.A. had already yelled it at the top of his lungs, added nothing to the court's dignity.

Ed Hull, caught in a trap of his own digging, had finally blamed the whole thing on the police department for not furnishing sufficient evidence. This tossed the mess in Shannon's lap and Shannon had come right out and said the jury had been bought. Shannon notably was not a diplomat. Captain

Goudy, chief of Homicide, had spoken to him about it afterward.

Miss Frances McGowan returned from the powder room. "My goodness, Shan, you look murderous!" she said.

"I feel murderous," he admitted. "Well, it's your party."

The *maître* opened the inner doors for them and led them to a table under the left-hand balcony. The place was crowded to overflowing, evidence that the word had got around. Bergdorf, scorning the private dining rooms upstairs, had chosen to have the banquet table set at the edge of the dance floor.

There were thirty places, all filled. Surprisingly, there was no rowdyism, no loud talking, though there was plenty of liquor being served. This, apparently, was a performance for the public. Even Shannon admitted it was good theater.

Bergdorf himself, a blond and benign version of the old feudal baron, sat at the head of the long table. He was ostensibly a brewer, all his other enterprises being merely hearsay. You could buy Bergdorf beer in every bar in three counties. You could buy it or else.

At the foot of the table sat Muzzy Marcel, small and sleek and beautiful, though perhaps not as happy as he should have been. Muzzy looked, indeed, a little worried. Pete Cagliostro, oily, fat and opulent, kept all within hearing in stitches. He was quite a wit.

Shannon chewed morosely on his steak. Miss Frances McGowan wrinkled her cute nose. "If I could only write!" she said.

"Yah!" Shannon sneered. "If you could only stop thinking you could write."

"I mean really write," she said. "There's a tremendous story here somewhere. Evil triumphs—temporarily, of course—over Good. That's you, Shan. You represent Good."

"The hell I do!" He glowered at her. "All I represent is a small part of the police department, which is supposed to represent what most people want. What most people want is guys like Bergdorf and the money he can spread around."

"That's cynical."

His knife attacked a heart of lettuce as though it were Bergdorf's heart. "I wish you'd tell me why Bergdorf wanted Muzzy out so badly."

"Why don't you ask Muzzy?" Frances said. "I think he's coming over."

Shannon half-turned in his seat. The dapper little hood was threading his way through the half hundred dancers and certainly making no effort to be inconspicuous about it. Behind him, those left at Bergdorf's table watched his progress with amused interest. When he was actually at Shannon's elbow he had succeeded in attracting the eyes of almost everyone in the supper room. He stuck out his hand.

"No hard feelings, Copper?" he said.

Shannon flushed dully. "Get out."

Marcel looked at Frances. "Is that nice? I ask you, babe, is that nice?"

Frances said pleasantly, "You dirty little murderer."

One of her small well-shod feet touched Shannon's on its way to kick Marcel in the shins. The little hood yelped and called Frances a very dirty name indeed. Shannon, furious at her for precipitating a scene, stood up and clipped Muzzy Marcel smack on the button.

Muzzy described a perfect arc, landing in the middle of the dancers. Women began screaming, men yelled and the band stopped dead, right in the middle of a bar. Not a single one of Bergdorf's guests had moved.

Shannon, acutely conscious of a hundred pairs of eyes on him, and of the hurried approach of the *maître* and a couple of bouncers, hauled Miss McGowan's chair out from under her. "Come on, let's get out of here," he said.

In the comparative quiet of the foyer he got his hat and coat, watched Frances shrug into her fur. "You got me into that, you little tramp," Shannon cried. "I want to know why."

Frances was indignant. "You heard what he called me!"

"Yes, and I saw you kick him!"

"I mean before that. He called me 'Babe.' And he—he leered!"

"Don't give me that!" Shannon said. "You're no outraged innocent. You've been leered at by experts." He grabbed her arms, pushed her out to the sidewalk. "What's the idea of provoking a fight?"

She feigned an anger as swift as his own. "What do you mean, *I* provoked it? I suppose *I* put him up to coming over in the first place!"

"I wouldn't put it past you," Shannon said. He hailed a cab and thrust her into it. When he slammed the door, himself remaining on the sidewalk, she regarded him with an air of hurt surprise. "You're actually brushing me off?"

"I'd like to brush you off permanently." He waved a fist at the hacker. "Take her someplace and lose her. She's poison!"

Shannon should have called it a day and gone home to bed, or gone somewhere and got drunk. But he was sore at Marcel and sore at Miss Frances McGowan and the night was still young and besides he had a hunch. Its genesis perhaps was the tremendous drive made by Bergdorf and Pete Cagliostro to spring a punk like Muzzy Marcel.

Muzzy was not and had never been big time. Others of Bergdorf's crew, caught in the toils of the law, had been allowed to take their raps. But in Muzzy's case it had even been considered necessary to resort to the highly dangerous tactics of bribing jurors.

In Shannon's mind there was no doubt that this had been done. But the reason for its doing was not

clear. The only one that Shannon could think of was that Muzzy Marcel had something on the ball, something that he had held as a threat over Bergdorf's head.

And so he had been sprung, and was being feted by his erstwhile employer and had probably been put up to tackling Shannon by either Bergdorf himself or Pete Cagliostro. Shannon sensed in all this a more or less carefully laid plan.

He walked east on Fifth Street, only half conscious of the crowds of window shoppers and theatergoers. He remembered Muzzy Marcel's look of worry, back at the banquet table.

Come to think of it, Muzzy had reason to be worrying about his immediate future. Threatening a guy like Bergdorf might be all right so long as you were safely in jail. But once on the outside it might not be so good. Shannon decided that if he were Muzzy he would take steps to assure himself of as much safety as is reasonably allotted to hoods.

At Fifth and Main Shannon turned into the Graybar, Muzzy Marcel's hotel. Muzzy had been living here at the time of his arrest and had managed to see that his rent was paid all during the trial. The hotel catered to traveling men and middle-class tourists and theatrical folk. Not to mention a bookie here and there and guys like Muzzy Marcel. The transcontinental bus stations were just around the corner.

Shannon wished to avoid recognition because he had no business in Muzzy Marcel's room. Being Shannon, he dismissed this as unimportant. He was on the verge of entering an elevator when someone touched his elbow. It was the night house dick, George Divine.

"Hello, George!" Shannon said.

Divine was a little man who smoked colossal cigars. "What gives, Irish?"

"Oh nothing. Just dropped in for a chat. They told me you were upstairs."

"I see," Divine said. His beady eyes were watchful, cagey. "Well, I'll buy a drink."

"Okay," Shannon said. Inside he was fuming. They went into the bar and had a couple of quick ones. Divine said, "You wouldn't be still working on Muzzy?"

"Hell, no, why should I?"

"I just wondered," Divine said.

A bellhop came through from the lobby, looking for him. There was a guy trying to sneak out wearing two suits and two overcoats. Divine went away. Shannon went back to the elevator bank and finally succeeded in getting to the fifth floor.

He used a gimmick on Marcel's door, a device illegal for even a dick to carry but surprisingly efficient. Once inside, with the door closed behind him, he reached out and snapped on the ceiling lights. The window shades were all drawn,

though the window behind one of them was apparently open. The shade flapped occasionally and the traffic noises were loud.

There was luggage on the floor of the closet, half a dozen suits on hangers. The drawers of the dresser and chifforobe were well-filled and odds and ends of unimportant jewelry lay on top of the dresser scarf. He went into the bath, found nothing of interest and was on his way back to the bedroom when it occurred to him that he had seen no razor. He knew that Muzzy had one, a beautiful gold-and-ivory electric, because he had seen the guy using it in jail.

His pulse quickened. A guy intending to travel usually thinks first of his razor. He got down on his hands and knees and looked under the bed. There was a small bag there. From the weight of it Shannon knew that it was packed. He was working on the snap fasteners, still on his knees, when he heard a voice behind him.

"Looking for something, pal?"

Something about the voice told Shannon that it was probably backed up by the authority of a gun. He turned his head cautiously and confirmed this impression. There was a gun. He could see it, and a fist and part of a coat-sleeve. He couldn't see anything else.

"What do you think?" he said.

"I think you're smarter than I am," the guy said. "The luggage in the closet fooled me. Just stay like you are, chum."

"Do I look crazy?" Shannon demanded.

"You look positively silly," the guy said. "Open the bag."

Shannon knew better than to crowd his luck. He fumbled with the bag's catches. They were locked. "It's no dice, lug," he said.

"That's all right," the guy said. "I guess I'll be able to carry it without a porter."

There was no sound of shifting feet, no faintest whisper of warning. Something, probably the guy's gun, struck Shannon heavily behind the ear. He fell forward across the bag, not out cold but stunned enough so that he could offer no resistance when the bag was slid out from under him. Hell, he couldn't even see.

II

Distantly came the sound of a door being opened and closed. Then there was nothing, and Shannon just sprawled there, letting the partial paralysis wear off. He was getting groggily to his hands and knees when the door opened and George Divine came in. The house dick grinned wolfishly.

"I had a hunch, Irish, you were giving me the old business."

Shannon got to his feet. "It's too damned bad you didn't think of it sooner."

Divine mouthed his cigar. "I was busy." He looked around the room. "What'd you take?"

Shannon stooped and picked up his hat. "Not a thing, pal." He felt of the slight swelling behind his ear. "You see anybody in the hall as you came up?"

Divine's eyes narrowed in suspicion. "So you did take something!"

"What gives you that idea?"

"Your trying to plant somebody else around." Divine took out his gun. "I'm going to have to search you, copper."

Angry blood crept up into Shannon's face. "You'll play hell too!"

"All right," Divine said. "It's either that or I make a report on it."

Shannon's eyes glowed. "Then make a report and be damned to you!"

Ignoring the gun he went to the door. No two-for-a-nickel house dick was going to submit him, John J. Shannon, to a frisk. Besides, if Muzzy Marcel filed a complaint Divine would talk anyway.

Shannon opened the door. Miss Frances McGowan was loitering just outside, pretending to be very busy touching up her lips.

"Why, Shan, how odd!" she said.

He almost choked. "What the hell are you doing here?"

She looked past him at the glowering Divine. "My goodness, guns and everything!" She giggled.

Shannon shook with impotent rage. No matter what he did now, Divine was bound to talk. Finding Shannon's girl friend also on the scene would be proof conclusive that the whole thing was carefully planned in advance.

Shannon gripped her arm savagely. "Come on, let's get out of here!" He started pushing her toward the elevators.

"Hey, wait!" Divine yelled.

Shannon half turned. "What for?"

In a quiet little bar around the corner on Spring Street Shannon ushered Frances into a booth. "Now, baby, you and I are going to have a little talk," he said.

"How nice," Miss McGowan said.

He scowled. "What's the idea of following me around?"

She affected surprise. "Who, me? Why, Shan, how can you say such a thing?"

He ordered rye from the waiter. Miss McGowan said she would have rye too.

"Did anybody ask you?" Shannon said. "God knows what I see in you."

The waiter thought this was very funny. His expression said that a guy must be very drunk indeed not to appreciate Miss McGowan's obvious charms.

Frances said, "Well, somebody's got to have a little ambition around here!" She eyed him obliquely. "Now on a captain's pay, maybe—"

He glared at her. "So you're throwing that up to me! I don't want any part of you." He did not mean this. Worse, he suspected Miss McGowan knew it. He changed the subject. "So you got the same idea

I did—that Muzzy might be scared of something."

The waiter came back with the drinks. Frances lifted hers in a toast. "We are not alone, Shannsy-wannsy. Probably a lot of other people thought of it too. Why was that cigar-chewing ape holding a gun on you?"

Shannon flushed. "He caught me in Muzzy's room." He suddenly thought of something. "Hey, you were hanging around outside. You happen to see a guy come out? A guy with a traveling bag?"

She shook her head. "Who was he?"

"How should I know?" Shannon demanded aggrievedly. He felt of the lump behind his ear. "It's getting so a cop doesn't have any rights at all anymore. Just pawns, that's what we are."

Frances chuckled. "A pawn is the lowest form of humor, Shan."

He made outraged noises. "Isn't it enough that I sit on my haunches and let a punk come in off the fire escape and knock me for a loop? No, I have to stand for these lousy eggs you lay too." He wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "By God I'd like to meet that monkey again!"

"What monkey?"

"Haven't I been telling you? The creep that clunked me—the creep that got away with Muzzy Marcel's bag."

Frances considered this a moment. "What was in the bag?"

"How should I know?" He glared at her. "All I know is the guy wanted it and I just sat there and let him take it."

Frances tapped her mouth lightly. "You reported it, of course?" she said.

Shannon scowled. "I'm in a fine position to report anything. That heel Divine. If there's anything missing and Marcel kicks, you and I are going to be accused of taking it. Divine himself will swear that there wasn't any mysterious stranger."

Frances closed her eyes in thought. "There are some very interesting angles to his case, Shan."

He stood up hurriedly. "Don't tell me. Come on, let's shove off. I'm tired."

She slid out of the booth. "You mean you're not going to do anything about it? Not even one teeny-weeny little thing?"

"Sure," he said, "I'm going to put you in a cab once more—just once—and then I'm going home to bed." At the curb outside he whistled a cab down. "And the first guy that says Muzzy Marcel to me—or Berg Bergdorf—" He slammed the cab door.

Frances rolled the window down. "All right for you, fraidy-cat. You'll be sorry."

"I already am!" Shannon yanked at his hat, thrust big hands deep in the pockets of his topcoat and walked angrily the four blocks to his own hotel.

It was not much of a hotel, the Commercial. It wasn't even as good

as Muzzy Marcel's. It just happened that Shannon had lived there for years and it had grown to be a sort of home. There was a man lying face down on his bed. Loud snores emanated from some point beneath one of the pillows and the room was redolent of stale liquor.

Shannon yanked the pillow off and turned him over. It was Happy Boyle, *Courier* legman. He opened one eye cautiously.

"What are you doing here?" Shannon was getting a little tired of asking this question. "You might at least take off your shoes."

Happy Boyle opened both eyes. "Where've you been?"

"A fine thing to ask me!" Shannon sneered. "At least I haven't been around sleeping in other people's beds. Why?"

Yawning widely Boyle sat up. "Oh, I just wondered." He watched Shannon's face. "One of the jurors has moved himself and family out of town. Funny time to be taking a trip, don't you think?"

Shannon stood perfectly still. "Who told you that?"

"A little birdie." Boyle grinned. "Matter of fact she was a lulu. She lived across the hall from the Baumgartners."

Shannon remembered Juror Baumgartner, a little man with a harried expression. He was the last man in the world you'd pick for a crook. "What gave you ideas about him, lug?" he asked.

Boyle shrugged. "I just thought I'd check up on the panel afterward—see how they felt about the case. This Baumgartner happened to be first on the list."

"So he took a trip and you went out and got drunk."

"Oh, no," Boyle said, "I was drunk anyway." He put a dramatic hand over his heart. "It hurts me—here—to see justice influenced by money. Especially when I haven't any." He thought a minute. "Money, I mean, not justice."

Shannon cursed. It seemed that no matter how hard he tried he couldn't get away from the case of *The People vs. Muzzy Marcel.* "Look, I'm a cop. Why don't you see the D.A. if you think you've got something?"

"The D.A. doesn't like me," Boyle said sadly.

"And I suppose I do?"

Happy was pained. "Well, don't you?" He got up, stretching. "How's about a fin till Saturday?"

"So that's it!" Shannon went to the dresser, began looking for his gun. In the top drawer with his handkerchiefs was his checkbook. He picked it up, put it down again, finally scrawled a check. Presently Boyle went away.

Shannon was still standing there, thinking, when he heard the door open again. He looked in the mirror. It was not Happy Boyle returning. It was Lieutenant Gus Vogel. His blue eyes avoided Shannon's. "Hello, there, John J.," said Gus.

Shannon turned slowly. "Don't tell me. The skipper wants to see me. That heel Divine, I suppose?"

Vogel still wouldn't look at him. "Well, yes and no, John J. Of course," he added apologetically, "there was the way you socked him too—right in front of all those people."

Shannon was startled. "Who—Divine?"

"Muzzy. Some of the boys just found him in a ditch." Naive blue eyes at last got around to Shannon's face. "You shouldn't ought to have done it, John J."

Hot blood crept up around Shannon's eyes. "You dumb Dutch fool! Do I look that crazy?"

"You was sore at him," Vogel said stubbornly. "Everybody knows you was sore at him. And you socked him right in front of a hundred people." His cupid's bow mouth tightened. "And Divine caught you in the guy's room." With almost unbelievable swiftness a gun appeared in one of his pudgy hands. "I gotta do it, John J. I gotta take you in."

Rage shook Shannon. Distorted pictures of Bergdorf and Pete Cagliostro and all the rest of them swam dizzily before his eyes and he yearned to get his two big hands on somebody and squeeze till something cracked.

"I wouldn't do nothing desperate, John J.," Vogel admonished.

He moved forward on his short thick legs and the gun in his fist kept getting bigger and bigger.

Shannon wiped sweat from his upper lip. "Yeah, you're right, Gus." He let his shoulders droop resignedly. "Cuffs?"

Vogel's eyes were sorrowful. "Now, John J., don't be—"

Shannon kicked him in the shins. Then, with perfect timing, he grabbed Vogel's gun hand with his own left and hung a nifty right on the round pink chin.

Vogel said, "Ahhh!" in a surprised kind of way and spun like a top.

When finally the smaller man sagged to the floor and lay still Shannon picked him up and laid him gently on the bed. He got his gun and topcoat and snapped off the lights and left the room. The ancient elevator creaked downward.

It was a little after ten o'clock when Shannon parked his car, without lights, under a giant pepper tree just south of the entrance gates of Bergdorf's estate. The gates themselves were open, apparently because the owner of the big sedan in the drive didn't expect to stay. There were lights on, both on the first and second floors.

Shannon was about to ring the bell when Bergdorf himself came out of a room at the right of the entrance hall. Yellow light silhouetted him against the glass of the front door. He had his hat and topcoat on. A woman came down the curving stairs, a dowdy plump little woman who was as out of place as an Ellis Island immigrant in the Biltmore. Mrs. Bergdorf hadn't grown up with her husband.

He kissed her perfunctorily and

Shannon, watching, felt like a Peeping Tom. Bergdorf said something Shannon couldn't hear and she turned and went back up the stairs. Bergdorf turned toward the door. Shannon opened it. His right hand, wrapped around his gun, was buried in his topcoat pocket.

"Hello, Berg," he said.

If Bergdorf was surprised he gave no sign of it. "Oh, it's you. I was just going out."

"You may still be," Shannon said, "though not the way you intended. This isn't a banana in my pocket."

Bergdorf looked at the bulge. "No, I didn't think it was." He began to laugh, not loudly. "First Muzzy, now me, eh?"

Shannon used the gun to gesture toward the open door on his right. "We've got a lot to talk about." He put a hand on Bergdorf's shoulder as they went through the door because there might be somebody beyond it, somebody who didn't like Shannon very well. The big living room was empty.

Bergdorf waved a large pink hand at the decanter and glasses on the table. "Drink?"

"Thanks," Shannon said. He didn't take one. Bergdorf chose a chair well away from the table. Shannon moved around the table, so that neither door nor window was at his back. There must be servants about. His dark eyes smoldered with resentment.

"It wasn't me that killed Muzzy," Shannon said.

"Wasn't it?" Bergdorf said. He might have been discussing the weather.

"Look," Shannon said irritably, "I've been pushed around all I'm going to be. You can give me the guys you sent after Muzzy Marcel or you can take a slug in the middle, where it hurts most." He lifted the gun. "I'm not fooling, Berg."

"By God," Bergdorf said, "I don't believe you are!" He narrowed his eyes in thought. "What makes you think I did for Muzzy?"

Shannon scowled. "You wanted him out, didn't you? And who framed the act in the *Chez Dolphus* so that I had to smack the guy before witnesses?"

Bergdorf looked at him. "I see what you mean, Shannon." He stood up suddenly. "Yes, I'm beginning to see a lot of—"

"Stand still!" Shannon said.

Bergdorf shrugged. "Look, copper, you're right on two counts, I wanted Muzzy out. Also I did send him over to rib you. But as far as wanting him sprung is concerned he could have rotted for all I cared."

Shannon stared. "The hell you didn't want him sprung! You wanted it so bad you had Cagliostro buy half the jury."

"Did I?" Bergdorf said. "Why?"

"Because he had something on you. And he threatened to spill his guts if he wasn't sprung."

Bergdorf took off his hat, took a handkerchief from his breast pocket,

wiped his forehead. "No doubt," he said.

He threw the hat in Shannon's face. Shannon's gun roared once before it was knocked out of his hand but the flung hat had confused him. He plunged forward, only to have his ankles caught from behind. He fell flat on his face. Just before Bergdorf kicked him on the chin Shannon caught sight of a pair of legs belonging to his unseen tackler. They were encased in black leather puttees. Then Bergdorf's toe landed . . .

III

He woke up to a ringing in his ears and a two-headed Mrs. Bergdorf floating eerily between ceiling and floor. He pushed himself groggily to his hands and knees, remembering that this was the second time he'd been knocked for a loop in the same evening. His rage was so great that it even drove the ringing bells away.

Mrs. Bergdorf became a single entity. "What did you do with my husband?" she wanted to know. "You shot him." She waved Shannon's own gun under his nose.

He slapped at it as a man slaps at a fly in mid-air. Surprisingly he hit it and it plopped to the floor. He had presence of mind enough to put a foot on it before Mrs. Bergdorf could get it a second time.

"Quit yelling, will you? I didn't shoot your lousy husband!"

"Then who did?"

Shannon controlled himself with an effort. "Nobody shot him, lady. Did it ever occur to you that a gun could go off without hitting anything?" He bent and picked up the gun and his hat. "You call the cops?"

She said she had. From some point not too far distant a police siren confirmed her statement. Shannon pointed the gun at Mrs. Bergdorf.

"Your old man's okay. He went away with his chauffeur." Shannon suddenly decided he didn't want to see any cops right now, pushed the babbling woman into a deep chair and ran out and down the drive. His car was where he had left it and he got in and was well down the street, moving leisurely, when the prowl car passed him. He waited till he saw in the rear-view mirror that the cops had turned into the Bergdorf drive before he gunned his own motor and went roaring down through Beverly Hills.

His mind was like an attic in an earthquake, full of a jumbled shifting miscellany, no two parts of which seemed to bear any relation to the others. Bergdorf's act—if it was an act—was not very convincing. But suppose it wasn't an act? Suppose it wasn't Bergdorf who had had Muzzy killed?

Shannon decided, temporarily at least, to believe Bergdorf. He had to have some base from which to start. Say that Bergdorf had not bribed the jury; that he really didn't care two hoots about Muzzy Marcel. This knocked hell out of the theory that the little hood had

something on his boss. It practically eliminated Bergdorf from the scene altogether.

Shannon shook himself, tooling the car down Wilshire through eleven-o'clock traffic. He was in imminent danger of being picked up by any one of the dozen prowl cars patrolling the boulevard. Once in the can, they'd beat hell out of him. Not for killing Muzzy but for the black eye it would give the department. Cops are not supposed to go around shooting people just because they are sore at them.

John J. Shannon, mouth bitter and eyes hot and resentful of the tricks Fate seemed to be playing him, returned resolutely to the problem at hand. If Bergdorf hadn't had Muzzy sprung, then who had? Cagliostro, Bergdorf's fat and oily and very clever attorney, had defended the little hood.

Was it possible that Cagliostro himself had wanted Muzzy out? That he had been working independently of Bergdorf? This theory implied a double-cross somewhere. Cagliostro, risking disbarment without direct orders from Bergdorf, was also risking his employer's displeasure if found out.

In a measure this tied in with Bergdorf's peculiar reactions. In other words Shannon had told Bergdorf something he didn't know, something that tied in with knowledge Bergdorf possessed and Shannon didn't.

Incidentally what was in Muzzy Marcel's locked bag? And who was the guy that had taken it from under Shannon's nose? Not Cagliostro, certainly—at least not in person. Shannon would have recognized Cagliostro's voice.

He tried to remember the voice. It seemed vaguely familiar. Shannon tried earnestly to fit the voice to a face, couldn't do it, finally gave it up and pulled into a parking lot next to an Owl drugstore.

In a phone booth he expended three coins trying to locate Cagliostro. He was unsuccessful. Next he called the *Courier* and asked for Happy Boyle. The reporter wasn't in either.

Shannon remembered Miss Frances McGowan. By God, if it wasn't for her he wouldn't be in half this trouble. It was *she* who had nagged him into going to the *Chez Dolphus*. It was *she* who had provoked Muzzy Marcel into making a crack Shannon couldn't overlook. *She* had kicked the little hood in the shins. And later she had turned up just outside Muzzy's hotel room.

Shannon dropped another coin and called her number. She answered almsot instantly. "Hello, darling."

Shannon swore. "You stay right there, you hear? I'm coming up to see you!"

"How nice!"

"You wait," he said. "You just wait." Certain that he was on the track at last, he banged out of the booth and rounded the corner into the parking lot. Two harness bulls were examining his car. Shannon ran like hell.

Frances McGowan's apartment house always gave Shannon an inferiority complex. He went up in an elevator almost as big as his own hotel room and along a hall that was carpeted ankle-deep. His mood lent emphasis to his knock, so much so that the door, apparently insecurely latched, opened under his fist and swung inward till it hit something soft but solid.

Looking down, Shannon saw a pair of short thick legs protruding from behind it. The legs were horizontal, indicating that whoever owned them wasn't likely to be belligerent. They belonged to Lieutenant Gus Vogel. Shannon got down on his knees and rolled Vogel over, looking for wounds. There weren't any, at least as far as Shannon could see. Puzzled, because he didn't think Vogel would pick a spot like this to just lie down and go to sleep, Shannon bethought himself of Frances and ran through the apartment. Miss McGowan was conspicuous by her absence.

"That girl!" Shannon cried. "That damn girl!"

He was now convinced that Frances was responsible for Vogel's condition, whatever that condition was. From the bath he got a flask of smelling salts and returned to the hall. Captain Goudy was standing just inside the door, waiting for him. The skipper was a red-faced man with an iron-gray bristly mustache and eyes like agates. The gun in his hairy fist was centered on Shannon's middle.

He called Shannon a very dirty name indeed, adding, "So you conked him again!"

Shannon's mouth fell open. "Who —*me?*"

Goudy thrust out a prominent chin. "Who else?"

Gus Vogel, ignored during this interchange, sat up, eyeing Shannon with more sorrow than scorn. "You shouldn't have done this to me, John J. Not twice in the same night."

"The hell I shouldn't!" Shannon cried. "I ought to beat the living daylights out of you right now." He took a step forward, balling his fists as though he intended to do that very thing. Captain Goudy's barked command dissuaded him. Goudy addressed Vogel.

"You mean you actually saw him?" he asked.

"How could I?" Vogel said, plaintively. "He was behind the door when Miss McGowan let me in."

Shannon snorted. "So she let you in, did she? Why, damn her eyes, I've got a notion to—"

"It's no good, Shannon," Goudy said harshly. "What have you done with Bergdorf?"

Shannon licked his lips. "I don't know. I've forgotten. Probably I knocked him off too, just like I did Muzzy Marcel."

In an access of rage he tore off his hat and hurled it to the floor. He discovered that he still held the bottle of smelling salts and he hurled this to the floor too. "Hell's

hinges, you guys make me sick! Go on and pinch me." He let his shoulders sag resignedly. "When your own pals go around accusing you, what is there left?"

Vogel almost wept. "Why, now, look, John J., there ain't no use taking it so hard. We understand how you come to do it only law is law."

"Sure," Shannon said sourly, "just a couple of public servants doing their duty." From the corner of his eye he watched Vogel get to his feet. Otherwise his attention was focused on Captain Goudy and the skipper's gun. When he thought that Vogel was close enough to reach he snaked out a hand, caught Vogel's wrist and whirled the smaller man into Goudy. He then backed through the living-room door, slammed it and turned the key.

"Yah," he jeered, "laugh that one off, you lugs!"

Two slugs blasted through the door. One of them, ricocheting, tore Shannon's right heel off and he limped for the nearest fire-escape window, slammed it open and made noises indicating that he was clambering through. Out in the hall the skipper and Gus Vogel were making kindling out of the connecting door.

Shannon climbed over the back of a divan and lay down behind it. He was quite comfortable except for the stinging sensation in his right heel. When the door finally crashed off its hinges he held his breath, unable to see what was going on but following events quite clearly by means of sounds. Vogel ran to the open window. Captain Goudy, wiser in Shannon's ways, pounded through the apartment, opening doors and banging them shut again.

Neither Goudy nor Vogel thought to look behind the divan. Shannon just lay there, not happy but pleased at having fooled them. Captain Goudy said grudgingly, "I guess he must have gone out the window."

Vogel, at the telephone, was reporting the latest news to Headquarters. At something that was said on the other end of the line he uttered a bleat of dismay. "What! My God, what next?"

Captain Goudy demanded what went on. Vogel's breath actually whistled. "He got Cagliostro too! Word just came in. Three times in the belly he got him!"

Goudy turned the air blue with profanity. "What a stink!" he groaned finally. "Not a cop in town is going to be able to carry a gun after this. Well, let's get to hell back downtown."

Vogel demurred. "And leave this place unguarded?"

Goudy cursed him. "You don't think he'll come back, do you? Not even Shannon is that crazy."

"Well," Vogel said doubtfully, "he's pretty crazy."

"All right," Goudy yelled, "then tell the cop on the beat!" He stomped out. Presently Vogel went

away too, latching the outside door securely.

After awhile Shannon got up and sat on the divan. So somebody had knocked off Pete Cagliostro too. Counting up on his fingers, Shannon found that, surprisingly, this made only two murders he was actually accused of. Until they found Bergdorf's body he was merely suspected of having kidnapped the big shot. He didn't think they would find Bergdorf's body.

Presently he got to his feet and began methodically to go over the apartment. After Vogel's story he was a little worried about Frances. He was still sore as hell at her but she was not the kind to call a man —especially little Gus Vogel, whom she liked—through a door so an accomplice could sock him.

In the first place Frances didn't believe in accomplices, with the possible exception of Shannon himself. Consequently he had to believe there was a second person standing behind the door with a gun trained on Miss Frances McGowan's very lovely body. Obeying the gun she might even have tried to signal Gus that something was wrong but the Dutchman was not quick on the uptake. He'd probably thought she was being coy.

There was no evidence of a struggle in the apartment. Nothing seemed disturbed beyond the casual disorder of recent occupancy, except, of course, for the door Goudy and Vogel and ruined. Therefore it was safe to assume Frances herself had let the guy in. Would she have done this if she hadn't known the man? Shannon decided she wouldn't.

He frowned, considering all the men Frances knew who might in any way be connected with this business. Bergdorf? Cagliostro? Muzzy Marcel? Certainly not Muzzy. Muzzy had been dead for quite some time before that.

A sudden thought brought Shannon up short. Maybe it had been Pete Cagliostro and Frances had in some manner got hold of a gun and killed the fat attorney herself.

This theory didn't exactly fit the Frances that Shannon knew. She was a screwball, but she wasn't that dumb. And anyway what would Cagliostro have wanted with her? What did anybody want with her? Abruptly Shannon was reminded of the scene in Muzzy Marcel's hotel room. Frances had been in the vicinity, might actually have been inside the room. Had the man with the unidentified voice known this? Had he suspected Frances of finding that which he himself could not find?

The telephone rang insistently. Shannon stared at it for a long moment, put out a hand to pick it up. "Yeah?" he said.

"Lieutenant Shannon?"

Shannon stiffened. The voice belonged to the man who had conked him in Muzzy Marcel's room. "Who wants to know?" he said.

"A friend, pal." There was a faint chuckle at the other end. "I

had an idea you'd be there, chum. The little lady told me she was expecting you and I figured you were smart enough to fool your flat-footed contemporaries."

"All right," Shannon said, "so I fooled them. What have you done with my gal?"

"Miss McGowan?" the voice said pleasantly. "Oh, she's quite comfortable—so far. Would you be interested in keeping her that way?"

A little muscle in Shannon's throat twitched. He was crazier about Frances than she or anybody else knew. He thought of her in the hands of a calculating so-and-so like this creep on the phone and his thoughts were not pleasant. "What do I do?" he asked hoarsely.

Again came that faintly mocking chuckle. "It seems that we were both wrong about that bag, chum. There was nothing in it but clothes. But Miss McGowan tells me there's a transcontinental bus station. She says she saw our mutual friend Marcel coming out of it early this evening."

Shannon cursed. "Then why don't you take your mob and wreck the station? Why don't you frisk Muzzy for the stub?"

"Believe me, friend, we did frisk him. There was nothing on him, or so we thought at the time. Of course we didn't know about the bus station."

"Well?"

"Here's what you do, chum. There is one place that stub might just happen to be—in Muzzy's hatband. Not the sweatband inside—we looked there—but in the outside band, maybe behind the bow. Unfortunately, when we got rid of Muzzy we got rid of his hat too. The cops have it now. It would be nice if you could get it—nice for Miss McGowan."

Sweat ran down off Shannon's forehead and into his eyes. "You're a fool. Even if I could get into Headquarters and out again—even if there is a check stub and I got it—you wouldn't dare let her live."

The voice became very business-like. "That's the chance you'll have to take, Shannon. There isn't any chance the other way."

Shannon wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "How do I contact you?"

"There's a drugstore at Third and Spring. It has only one phone booth. I'll call you there in half an hour?"

"Give me an hour," Shannon said.

"All right, an hour." There was a slight pause. "But no tricks. Get it?"

"Yes," Shannon said, "I get it."

He cradled the phone and as he did so his eyes centered on something he should have seen before. There was a half-empty highball glass on the table and someone had deliberately ignored the coaster beside it and made a series of rings on the bare polished mahogany. The rings were turning white from the moisture. There were four of them.

IV

It was a small neat bungalow in the middle of a row of larger more pretentious house. Shannon would have approached it cautiously anyway but the big, black sedan parked in the driveway made necessary not only caution but speed. The sedan was the one he had previously seen in the drive at Bergdorf's house.

He went quietly but swiftly along the dark and narrow service walk of the two-story house next door. Through the dividing hedge he could see that Bergdorf's chauffeur was not in the car. This could mean that he was in the bungalow with his boss or it could mean that Bergdorf had dropped him somewhere. The latter was more likely.

There was a light in the bungalow kitchen. Praying that the screen door wasn't latched and that it wouldn't squeak, Shannon tried it gingerly. It was unlocked. So was the kitchen door beyond it. He went through a third door into a dining room. His gun was out and he was sure he was in time because he could hear voices.

The dining room was dark save for what light filtered in from the hall. Across the hall was the living room and in the open archway stood Bergdorf. His back was toward Shannon but his very attitude was menacing and even though Shannon couldn't see the gun in the big man's fist he knew that it was there.

Two steps carried him across the entry hall and in a single motion he chopped down on Bergdorf's gun arm and planted a hard left to the kidneys. Bergdorf sprawled into the room. Following him Shannon caught Walter Wheeler in the act of grabbing a gun from the desktop.

"I wouldn't, Wheeler," he said. To emphasize the warning his own gun banged and the slug chipped wood not two inches from the gun. The *Mirror* reporter jerked his hand away.

"What the hell!" he cried.

Bergdorf came to his feet with a bull-like bellow and Shannon, never taking his eyes off Wheeler, kicked out with his left foot and caught him in the shins. Bone snapped. Bergdorf's legs buckled under him and he sat down heavily. He didn't try for the gun on the floor.

Wheeler said angrily, "Now see here, Shannon, you can't come in like—"

"The hell I can't," Shannon said. "I'm in." He relaxed a little, stepping back out of possible reach of Bergdorf's arms. "Maybe you're lucky at that, because Berg was probably going to let you have it—like he did Cagliostro."

Bergdorf began to laugh. It was a little horrible, with him sitting there with a numbed arm and a broken leg. "So I gunned Cagliostro!" he said.

"I think so," Shannon nodded. "If we're lucky we can even prove it by the rod I just knocked out of your fist." He stared very hard at

Walter Wheeler. "Where's the girl, chum?"

The reporter did a very creditable bit of acting. "What girl?"

Shannon lifted his gun and shot a piece of Wheeler's ear off. "You get that, don't you?"

Wheeler's eyes were unbelieving. "You *shot* me!" Still not quite believing it he put up a hand to his face. The hand came away bloody. Suddenly, bonelessly, he sat down in the chair behind him.

Shannon said, "The girl, chum?" Bergdorf laughed again. "Better tell him punk."

Wheeler waved weakly toward a connecting door. "In the bedroom, Shannon. So help me, she's all right."

Shannon made the mistake of underestimating Wheeler. For just an instant his eyes followed the reporter's gesture and Wheeler came out of his chair, snatched the gun and fired. Shannon's weapon was jerked from his fist by invisible strings and he looked down dazedly at his numbed fingers. Then, yelling bloody murder, he plunged for the man behind the desk. Bergdorf rose in his path and tripped him.

When finally he sat up Bergdorf too had a gun. Oddly the gun was pointed not at him but at Wheeler. The two men, each with a gun, stared at each other. Bergdorf was on one knee, the other leg trailing off at an unnatural angle. Wheeler was standing, partially screened by the desk.

"Check and double-check, Berg," said Wheeler.

"Not quite," Bergdorf said, "My gun is cocked. Yours isn't."

Wheeler looked down and saw that this was true. "I haven't got the stuff. I told you that before."

"Cagliostro said you were getting it."

Shannon moved tentatively. Both men looked at him. He subsided. Wheeler said, "Maybe Shannon got the stub out of Headquarters before coming here." He licked his lips. "Maybe we could forget our differences, Berg, and clean this thing up yet."

"Unh-unh," Shannon said. "No matter what you do to me you can't clean it up. The cops will be here any minute."

Bergdorf's eyes searched Shannon's face. "That the truth, copper?"

"It's a fact," Shannon said. "I had to make it a little faster than they could on account of the girl. But they'll be here, believe it or not."

Wheeler wiped blood from his cheek with his free hand. "Personally I don't choose to believe it. There was no possible lead to me."

Shannon laughed. "I'm here, which sort of knocks all your theories to hell and gone. It couldn't have happened but it did."

Out in the hall there was a minute sound, so minute that Shannon hoped the others hadn't heard it. He had been telling the truth about the cops and it looked as

though they might have arrived.

He said casually, stalling for time, "That gal of mine is smart, Wheeler. When you were talking to her she had a highball in her hand. She made four little rings on the nice new table with it, four wheels, get is? Wheels for Wheeler. So I finally connected a voice I'd heard with the right party." He grinned crookedly.

Bergdorf said absently, "Well, if the cops are coming there's no use waiting, is there?"

Before Shannon, suspecting his purpose, could do more than yell, Bergdorf shot Wheeler smack in the teeth. Then Captain Goudy and Gus Vogel and almost a dozen other cops were in the room and sprawling all over him. Shannon ran for the bedroom. Frances wasn't there. He was almost weeping by the time he thought of the closet. He found her on the floor, taped up like a mummy and neatly smothered beneath a most untidy looking pile of Wheeler's suits and overcoats.

Freeing her, he bent and kissed her on the mouth, an unusual gesture for Shannon. "Lord, I'm glad to see you, hon!"

"Well," she said acidly, "it certainly took you long enough to get here."

He glared at her. "Why didn't you tell me you trailed Muzzy Marcel to that damn' bus station?"

"I didn't trail him there, dope! I just followed him to his hotel and then lost him. Snooping around I ran into him again, coming out of the terminal."

Shannon lips curled. "It's still too bad—too bad you could take Wheeler into your confidence but not me."

Captain Goudy barged in. "By God, Shannon, it's a wonder you couldn't have kept all this from happening! Muzzy Marcel is dead, Cagliostro is dead and now Wheeler. It's a wonder—"

"What am I," Shannon demanded, "a Houdini?"

"I can think of a hundred better names than that!" Goudy snapped. He glared at Frances. "And as for you—"

"And as for me," she said decisively, "I need a bath." At the door she turned. "Did you get the stuff? Did you find the check stub where I told Wheeler it would be?"

Goudy's mouth fell open. "You did that?"

She preened herself. "Smart, hunh?"

To save Goudy a stroke of apoplexy, Shannon pushed her out into the living room. Berg Bergdorf, now in a chair, was surrounded by a ring of cops. Sighting Shannon he was almost apologetic.

"I had to give it to Wheeler, pal." Berg said. "You were right about the gun. It would have hung me for Cagliostro anyway and the law might have been too easy on Wheeler. I just made it a clean sweep."

Shannon suddenly found that he

was shaking. "But for the love of heaven, why?"

Gus Vogel, naive blue eyes startled, said, "You mean you don't know?"

Shannon scowled. "Don't try to tell me you figured it out all by yourself. What was it that Muzzy checked at the bus station?"

"A bag full of books!" Vogel announced triumphantly.

Shannon looked positively stupid. "*Books!*"

"My books," Bergdorf explained. "I kept a private set—ones the income tax boys weren't supposed to see. They'd have landed me in Alcatraz."

Captain Goudy came out and stood close to Shannon as though expecting him to try another escape. "You won't have to worry about Alcatraz any more, Berg. Not with two murder raps against you." He took a breath. "So what happened to this private set of records?"

"Muzzy Marcel copped them," Bergdorf said. His face gave no sign of the pain his broken leg must be giving him. "I knew they were gone but I didn't know who had them. I never did suspect Muzzy because he was just a punk. He wouldn't have known which way was up unless somebody told him."

"Cagliostro?"

Bergdorf nodded. "I got most of the rest of it from Cagliostro." He looked at Shannon. "You remember when you accused me of bumping Muzzy? And you said the jury had been bribed to spring him? Well, if that was done the orders weren't mine. I went to Cagliostro about it." He lifted a big fist and looked at the skinned knuckles.

"After a while I persuaded him to talk. It was he that put Muzzy up to stealing the books. Muzzy got them. But in the meantime Shannon, here, had been working on an old kill and he finally pinned it on Muzzy Marcel. So the punk was pinched and thrown in the can. He threatened to tear the whole thing wide open if he wasn't sprung. So Cagliostro had to get busy and spring him."

Captain Goudy gnawed at his mustache. "It looks like Muzzy was smarter than you gave him credit for."

Again Bergdorf nodded. "In a way he was. He had plenty of time to think while he was in the can. He must have figured that if what he had was important enough to force Cagliostro to spring him, then it must be worth some real dough.

"So when he got out he managed to slip away from my celebration party long enough to stash the stuff. Or else he had already stashed it at the bus terminal and was just making sure it was still there. Then, after the trouble at the *Chez Dolphus*, Wheeler and Cagliostro got hold of the little heel and really went to work on him. He almost got away. In trying to stop him they filled him full of lead." Little beads of sweat were forming on

Bergdorf's forehead now. His eyes looked tired. "Well, I guess that's all, boys."

"Like hell it is," Goudy yelped. "Where does Wheeler fit?"

Bergdorf grinned. "Wheeler fits in a coffin, where all chiselers ought to fit." He glanced briefly at Shannon. "No hard feelings, copper. I don't blame you for trying to get out of a spot anyway you could. That's what I was trying to do. Walter Wheeler, you see, was advance agent for what is known in the East as The Syndicate. He got a job on the *Review*, because there is no place like a newspaper job to get the inside dope.

"The Syndicate, according to Wheeler, was going to do big things for the people that helped them. They were really going to organize the Coast. All they had to do was get me out of the picture first. They were going to sic the government on me."

Gus Vogel was talking to Frances. "Well, now, Miss McGowan, it seems like you could have told me there was a guy behind the door."

She regarded him as one does a backward child. "Why, Gus, didn't you see me wink at you?"

"Well, sure," he said. "Well, sure, but I thought . . ." He colored in embarrassment.

The room echoed with Shannon's ribald laughter. "He thought you were trying to make him. Behind my back!"

Miss McGowan glared at him. "What's so funny about that? You think I wouldn't?" She bent and kissed the embarrassed little man full on the mouth. "You just come up and see me again, Gus. We'll show that lug Shannon."

Since American winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature number exactly three (Sinclair Lewis, Pearl Buck, William Faulkner) it is a fortunate thing for readers of detective and mystery stories that one of them, at any rate, deals from time to time with stories of violence. Otherwise the work of none of this eminent triumverate could be included in such a magazine as this.

However, Mr. Faulkner, whose preoccupation with the darker facets of human motivation and behavior is world-famous, does not hesitate to let his characters lead him into violations of virtually all the Commandments when provocation is sufficient. And when he does tell of sin and, perhaps, more evil retribution, as in THAT WILL BE FINE, he is top man at the game. This he proves beyond reasonable denial in the next issue of TSDM.

but the patient died

by . . . Lawrence G. Blochman

Dr. Coffee hated meddlers but a murder undetected was more than this pathologist could stomach.

THE SURGEON HESITATED in the doorway of the pathology laboratory as if he dreaded to cross the threshold. His hand trembled when he lit a cigarette, waiting for the pathologist to look up from his microscope.

Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, however, continued to peer intently through the twin lenses. The handiwork of the staff surgeons of Pasteur Hospital was going through the daily wringer and Dr. Coffee was busy handing out good and bad marks, according to what he found in the tissue of a score of tonsils, appendices and other discarded bits of human anatomy that came to him from the operating rooms.

"Appendix—normal," Dr. Coffee was dictating to his chief technician, who sat beside him. "No inflammation, no congestion. Damn it, Doris, that's half a dozen normal appendix sections I've seen this week." He bent his mop of sandy hair closer to the microscope. His lower lip protruded indignantly. "Whose case is this, Doris? If it's that dollar-grabbing society butcher from the Heights, again, I'll—"

Doris Hudson interrupted the pathologist. She nodded to the

Larry Blochman, born that rara avis a native Californian, has the further distinction of being one of the most compulsive of literary pefectionists where authenticity is concerned. For the pathological background of his Dr. Coffee stories, of which this is an example, Blochman spent months simply sitting around hospital laboratories and the Bellevue Morgue in Manhattan. When Dr. Coffee runs a test, it is the real thing.

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surgeon in the doorway as she said, "I think Dr. Andrews wants to speak to you."

Dr. Coffee uncurled his long legs from around the legs of the chair and stood up. He held out a big, fur-knuckled hand. "Hello, Andy," he said. "What's on your mind?"

There was obviously something very much on Dr. Andrews' mind. His young face was gray with worry and his lips were taut. "Could I see the pre-operative lab reports on the Baron case again, Dan?" he asked. "That's Mrs. Harriet Baron."

"Why, sure. Doris will get them. Trouble?"

Dr. Andrews nodded. "She died," he said. "Just now. Went out like a light. I can't understand it."

"Too bad, Andy."

"She was a beautiful thing, Dan." Dr. Andrews seemed to be talking reproachfully to himself. "Young, long golden hair, married only a year. . . ."

"Harriet Grey Baron," announced Doris Hudson, handing a card to Dr. Coffee.

"You know I never send a patient to the operating table, Dan," said Dr. Andrews, "unless the lab says she's ready for surgery. I didn't overlook anything, did I? No mistake?"

Dr. Coffee scanned the report. Blood count . . . Kahn test . . . Urinalysis . . . Coagulation time . . . Vitamin K estimation . . . The young surgeon was thorough, all right. He had asked for practically every test in the book.

"Looks okay to me, Andy. What happened?"

"I wish to God I knew." Dr. Andrews made a helpless gesture. "It was a simple operation—an old appendix. I've done dozens and dozens and never lost a patient before."

"Did she die under the anaesthetic?"

"No, she'd come out of it. Then she began to sink. She died while I was giving her plasma. The incision was bleeding some, so I thought maybe I'd misread your report on coagulation time or a Vitamin K deficiency but—I can't understand it."

"Will the relatives authorize an autopsy?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"The family's in the waiting room. I haven't told them yet. I wanted to get hold of myself first."

"We can send one of the internes," Dr. Coffee said.

"No, Dan. It's my case. I ought to face the family."

"I'll go with you," said Dan Coffee—and was immediately surprised at himself. He had always cherished the pathologist's insulation from difficult contact with bereaved relatives. Aside from the challenge of unexplained death, however, he liked Dr. Andrews, a lot—and Dr. Andrews was in trouble.

It was always tough for a surgeon to lose a patient and for Dr. Andrews, just out of the Army

and established in Northbank only a few months, it was doubly tough. Not that Northbank was more intolerant or impulsive in its judgments than any other city of a hundred thousand population. Northbank rather prided itself on its culture and civic broad-mindedness. Northbank was proud of its fine modern school buildings, built by politically-influential contractors whose profits would have guaranteed its underpaid teachers a living wage for a decade.

Northbank was proud of its handsome residential district on its scenic Heights and a little ashamed —every few years at flood-time— of its rickety slums on the river shore below the high-water mark. It was proud of its Municipal Auditorium and its symphony orchestra, of its country clubs and golf courses, of its parks and playgrounds, of the richness of its surrounding farm lands which fed its growing food-canning industry.

It was proud of its liberalism when the cannery workers elected a socialist to the City Council, although slightly deaf to the new councilman's cry that the municipal hospital reeked of formaldehyde, graft, and poverty. After all, Northbank's private hospitals were modern and progressive and attracted skilled physicians and surgeons. Northbank, in a word, put great value on success, and might not take kindly to a young surgeon who had lost one of his first cases in a new town. . . .

"Come on, Andy," said Dr. Coffee. "Let's go."

The waiting room in the surgical wing of Pasteur Hospital was very much like a hundred other waiting rooms in a hundred other hospitals in the American Middle West. The last cheerless light of the setting sun filtered through the many windows to scatter shadows over the impersonal neatness of the wicker furniture and the potted rubber plants. The false casualness of visitors awaiting word of life or death made subdued voices as hollow as the fierce efforts at concentration of those who pretended to read.

The surgeon and the pathologist approached a group of four people in the far corner of the room. All four were young although one of the two women—the one in the fur jacket—had managed, with the aid of cosmetics and *haute couture*, an air of worldly wisdom beyond her years. The other woman was quite plain but her unadorned freshness fairly breathed pleasant friendly candor.

One of the men was brashly blankly handsome, with an expensive tweedy aura about the studied carelessness of his sports clothes. The other man wore a sailor's uniform. There was a petty-officer's rating on his sleeve. They sat in pairs, separated by an empty chair on which the sailor had thrown his flat hat and pea-jacket.

"Mr. Baron," said Dr. Andrews,

The handsome tweedy young man stood up. So did the plain-looking girl with the white scarf around her light brown hair. The girl said, "I'm afraid I have bad news for you."

"You can't mean, Doctor, that my sister is—" She choked on the last word.

The tweedy young man merely looked blank.

"She's gone, Margery," said Dr. Andrews to the girl in the white scarf. "She went very quickly just a few minutes ago."

The tweedy young man shook his head as though he did not understand. His expression did not change. He said, "My wife . . . ?"

Margery sobbed. The sailor got awkwardly to his feet and put a timid hand on her shoulder.

The woman in the fur jacket crossed her silken legs and opened her *suède* bag. The emerald-cut diamond on her right hand sketched an arc of cold fire as she raised a fragrant wisp of lace to dab at her long, dark eyes.

There was a moment of tense silence. It was a strange unreal silence, yet the tenseness was almost tangible as it permeated the little group like a turgid cloud of noxious vapor. Dr. Coffee thought, This is not the dumb, incredulous silence of sudden grief. There is something more here—hate, perhaps, or suspicion or even some unnatural exultation masquerading as stunned wordless sorrow.

". . . my sympathy . . ." Dr. Andrews was saying softly, sincerely.

Dr. Coffee scarcely heard the surgeon's words. He was trying to analyze the uneasy currents of human emotion swirling around him. He did not like what he felt but he could not tell why. He looked from face to face, from mask to mask. That was it—they *were* masks.

The tragi-comic mask of the husband with its frozen handsomeness unable to comprehend the finality of death, unable to register anything except its own charm. The alabaster mask of sheer abstract beauty of the woman in the fur jacket, a tragic mask as impersonal in its beauty as death itself.

The bronzed mask of classic comedy that the sailor wore, a mask of clumsy tenderness clumsily fumbling with the brutal fact of a warm kindred spirit grotesquely and senselessly wounded. Even little sister Margery was wearing a mask, a tearstained mask of indecision which was neither stricken child nor bewildered woman.

"But you said it was such a simple operation," the husband mumbled. His limpness bumped the chair next to the woman in the fur jacket and jelled into a sitting posture.

"Let me explain," said Dr. Coffee. "I'm pathologist at this hospital and in a way just as much responsible for what has happened to Mrs. Baron as Dr. Andrews. You don't know me, because the pa-

thologist works backstage. But my laboratory has checked every phase of Mrs. Baron's condition. I'm sure you won't find much comfort in it now but I think you should know that Mrs. Baron couldn't have been in more competent hands than Dr. Andrews'."

The woman in the fur jacket gave a short brittle bitter laugh. "That's an old one," she said. "The operation was successful but the patient died."

"Mrs. Baron's death is just as mysterious as it is tragic," Dr. Coffee said. "Mr. Baron, will you give permission for an autopsy which may clear up the mystery?"

Baron was sitting with his head in his hands. Without looking up he said, "No. You've done plenty already. Let her alone now. Don't touch her."

"But Mr. Baron, you consented to an operation. An autopsy is just another operation in a way."

"No," the husband repeated.

Dr. Andrews said, "Margery, you want to know why your sister didn't pull through, surely. You'd consent to an autopsy."

The girl with the white scarf around her hair opened her lips but did not speak. She turned her blue eyes toward the sailor, as though seeking an answer in the jutting angle of his square tanned jaw. Whatever she saw there seemed to frighten her. Her eyes widened. Then her lips closed again with some new-found strength. She was no longer plain-looking. She was suddenly mature, resolute, even beautiful with the beauty of character.

"If Jerry says no," she said quietly, "I think you should respect his wishes."

"In that case," said Dan Coffee, "I shall advise Dr. Andrews to refuse to sign the death certificate."

Baron's head bobbed up belligerently from his hands. "What does that mean?" he demanded.

"In event of unexplained death the law of this state requires that the Coroner be notified. The body cannot be released to you until the Coroner is satisfied as to the cause of death. He will probably order an autopsy."

"I think that's cruel," Margery said. There was no anger in her voice. "At least you'll let us see Harriet?"

"Naturally," said Dr. Andrews. "If you'll come with me—"

"Wait a minute." The sailor's raised elbow intercepted the surgeon. "Don't the family rate just one cry in private?"

The dead woman's sister closed her eyes and leaned her head against the sailor's shoulder. "Oh, Steve!" she whispered.

On the way back to the pathology laboratory, Dr. Coffee asked Dr. Andrews, "Who's the dame with the dead foxes and the ice cube? I've seen her somewhere before. Is she another sister?"

"Diana Price," Dr. Andrews replied, "is a girlhood chum. Went to

some Eastern finishing school with Mrs. Baron. Career woman. When the Price family moved to California, Diana stayed here and opened her own real estate agency. She's made quite a bit of money and evidently spends it all. Café society."

"Something's wrong with her," Dr. Coffee said. "Did you notice the skin around her eyes? And her lips?"

"I couldn't see beyond the Helena Rubenstein layer," said Dr. Andrews.

"What does Baron do for a living?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"Stocks and bonds. Customers' man, I think. Dan, is the Coroner going to do us any good?"

"I think so."

"Of all the coroners I ever knew," said Dr. Andrews, "about one in ten was capable of performing an intelligent autopsy."

"Make it one in twenty," said Dr. Coffee. "Our local boy is one of the other nineteen. Dr. Thomas Vane, Northbank County Coroner, is just beginning to accept the idea that some diseases are caused by bacteria, and I doubt if he believes in viruses. But he has one great advantage—he's lazy."

"You mean he'll let you do the autopsy?"

"If I work it right," said Dr. Coffee.

Doris Hudson was lifting a steel rack of slides from a xylol bath as the two doctors entered the laboratory. She wiped her fingers on a towel, brushed a tendril of dark hair from her forehead and smiled. She was tall and slim and wore her white smock as though it had been designed by Schiaparelli.

"Your wife called, Dr. Coffee," she said. "She asked me to remind you that your Aunt Mary is coming for dinner. She said to tell you to be on time because she finally got her hands on some of those Delmonico cuts you've been demanding for so long—the thickest, most magnificent steaks seen in Northbank since Pearl Harbor. And she said please not to bring along any homework in Mason jars on account of Aunt Mary's finicky appetite."

"Thanks, Doris," Dr. Coffee said. "Will you call the police station for me? I want Lieutenant of Detectives Max Ritter."

An instant later Dr. Coffee was speaking into the phone. "Hello, Max," he said. "Dan Coffee. We've got something here at the hospital which may be something for you or it may be nothing. Anyway I want to make a coroner's case of it. . . . Well, a woman died mysteriously after an operation, and the relatives refuse permission for an autopsy. . . . That's right, Max—not quite kosher. Think the Coroner will insist on doing the autopsy himself? . . . That's right, Max, it's Wednesday—the Coroner's pinochle night. . . . The woman's name was Harriet Grey Baron. She— Oh, you do, eh? . . . Sailor? Yes, there was a sailor here today. . . . You

do? . . . Okay, Max, I'll be waiting for you."

Dr. Coffee grinned as he hung up. "Max is bringing the Coroner personally—just to watch. The Coroner won't stay long."

"What did he say about a sailor?" Dr. Andrews asked.

"Let me tell you about Ritter," said Dr. Coffee. "Max is a Northbank boy—son of a junk dealer. He had to leave high school in his third year—father died and he had a mother and sister to support—but he's smart as a Quiz Kid. Worked up from flatfoot to be youngest lieutenant in the detective bureau."

"And the sailor?"

"I'm coming to that. Max says he went to high school with a boy named Steve Forest who was engaged to marry Harriet Grey when he went to war. Three years in the Navy, two in the Pacific. Max says Steve Forest just came home a few days ago."

"And found his fiancée married to Mr. Jerry Baron?"

Dan Coffee nodded. "Coming to the autopsy, Andy?"

"I'll be there," said Dr. Andrews.

Coroner Thomas Vane was a large florid triple-chinned gentleman who seemed to swim in the floodlighted glare as he entered the white-tiled autopsy room. He was a head shorter and two paunches thicker than the slight dark curly-haired lieutenant of detectives who accompanied him. The Coroner shook hands with Dr. Andrews, then waved away the white gown and rubber gloves that Dr. Coffee offered him.

"This is your party, Coffee," he said. "And what's the idea, anyhow, of calling me in a case like this, when you've got a whole hospital full of doctors to sign the certificate?"

"Unexplained death, Coroner," said Dr. Coffee. "You authorize me to go ahead?"

"Sure, go ahead." The Coroner's bald pate gleamed rosily as he nodded. "But I think you're wasting your time and mine."

Dr. Coffee said nothing but his underlip protruded. He glanced at the golden hair cascading over one end of the stainless-steel table in a frozen torrent. Then he picked up his scalpel.

"Great stars!" he said a moment later. "Look at this."

Dr. Andrews grimaced. "Good lord!" he exclaimed. "The poor girl bled to death internally."

"Just as I thought," said the Coroner. "Surgical shock and internal hemorrhage." He winked at Dr. Coffee. "Nothing criminal here. Nobody to blame. I'll just sign the death certificate."

"Don't you want to wait till I've finished?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"Not necessary," said the Coroner. "I'll leave the certificate with you. I've got to run along. Glad to've met you, Andrews."

When the Coroner had gone, Lieutenant of Detectives Max Ritter

asked, "Why did she bleed to death, Doc?"

"I won't know for a few hours yet," Dan Coffee said. "I've got to take samples of the blood to my lab. But it's homicide, Max."

"Why, Doc?"

"Lab tests showed Mrs. Baron in good physical shape this morning," Dan Coffee said. "Her blood clotted in the normal time of three minutes. A few hours later her blood just wouldn't clot at all, so that she bled to death despite a technically perfect operation. I've got to find out what happened to her in those few hours."

"I think I get the idea," Max Ritter said. "Somebody put drops in her Ovaltine."

"Possibly," said Dr. Coffee. "Or she was given something hypodermically. It may have been a nurse's error."

"You can rule out the nurse's error," said Dr. Andrews. "I gave her the pre-operative morphine myself. I'm sure it was correct."

"Look, Doc," said Max Ritter. "Why don't I do a little leg work while you make with the test tubes? Maybe Doc Andrews can give me a list of people who saw Mrs. Baron today."

Dr. Andrews obliged with the names of the nurses, an interne, Jerry Baron, Margery Grey and Diana Price. He did not know the name of the sailor but Ritter said it was Steve Forest.

"How late do you think you'll be cooking with the Bunsen burner tonight, Doc?" Ritter asked.

"Probably until around midnight," said Dr. Coffee.

"I'll drop in," said the detective.

The hush of night had settled over the surgical wing of Pasteur Hospital. An occasional nurse moved silently down the corridor in response to the mute appeal of a red call light. Somewhere behind a closed door a patient moaned in his sleep. A sleepy orderly pushed an empty stretcher cart past the door of the pathology laboratory.

Inside the laboratory there was no sound except the sibilant breath of the Bunsen burner and the faint tinkle of thin glass as Dr. Coffee bustled among his flasks and beakers He replaced a test tube of pinkish liquid in its rack and took up another tube. He added a colorless solution, drop by drop, counting the drops. He shook the tube and chuckled to himself. Then he said aloud, "It checks. I was right. It checks."

"What checks, Doctor?" said a pleasant feminine voice behind him.

Dan Coffee turned, startled. "Oh, hello, Doris," he said. "Why aren't you home in bed?"

Doris Hudson placed a paper bag and a cardboard container on the pathologist's workbench. "I thought you could use a trained lab technician," she said, "and also some coffee and a sandwich. You always forget to eat—even when there's steak for dinner."

"Great stars!" Dr. Coffee looked at his watch. "I was supposed to go home for dinner tonight, wasn't I?"

"I phoned your wife," Doris said. "I told her you'd been detained by an important autopsy."

"Thanks, Doris. Was she furious?"

"She never gets furious any more. She was as sweet and resigned as usual and a little wistful over the prospect of entertaining your Aunt Mary for a whole evening. Aren't you going to eat your sandwich?"

"Sure," said Dr. Coffee. He shook the test tube again.

"It's corned beef on rye. Sorry it's not Delmonico steak. What checks, Doctor?"

"I've been titrating against Mrs. Baron's blood with protamin sulphate," said Dr. Coffee. "I've found heparin."

"Heparin? Isn't that what they use in blood transfusions?"

"Sometimes to prevent clotting. Heparin is a powerful anti-clotting agent."

Dr. Coffee was unwrapping his sandwich when the door opened, and Margery Grey came in. She was dressed in black. The bloom was gone from her cheeks. She was very pale, and seemed much older. She leaned against the door jam, breathing rapidly.

"They've arrested Steve Forest," she said when she had caught her breath. "Nobody will tell me where he is. I've got to find him. Where's Lieutenant Ritter?"

Dr. Coffee shook his head. "Why do you come here, Miss Grey?"

"I've looked everywhere else. Anyhow, you started all this. You brought in the police. Why did you do it, Doctor? Why?"

"Because your sister was murdered, Miss Grey," said Dr. Coffee. "Deliberately, cleverly and diabolically murdered."

"But how, Doctor?"

"With an injection of heparin that made her bleed to death after her operation."

"Steve Forest didn't do it." Margery Grey looked Dan Coffee squarely in the eye.

"Did Lieutenant Ritter arrest him for murder?"

"No, he . . . Lieutenant Ritter said he was arresting Steve for obstructing justice and destroying evidence."

"What evidence, Miss Grey?"

"Well, when Lieutenant Ritter came to our house, Steve and I were going through poor Harriet's things. We were tearing up some old letters Steve wrote to Harriet from the Pacific when he was still engaged to marry her. The Lieutenant said we were destroying incriminating evidence. Maybe some of the letters did *seem* incriminating. . . ."

"Did Steve ever threaten to kill your sister?"

"Well, in one letter, the one he wrote just after Harriet threw him over to marry Jerry, Steve said he'd strangle Harriet with his bare hands if he ever saw her again . . . but that was a year ago, and—oh, I don't know, Doctor, but if *I* wanted to kill somebody in anger

or for revenge or because I hated them for hurting me . . .

"Well, I think I'd want them to know I was doing it, to hear what I had to say. But the way you explain it whoever killed Harriet planned it carefully so he'd never be found out. It just couldn't have been Steve. It couldn't."

"How can you be so positive, Miss Grey?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"Because . . ." The girl's voice faded almost to a whisper. "Well, because Steve didn't love Harriet any more. He told me so. When he came back and saw her again he knew it was all over."

"And he loves you now?" suggested Dr. Coffee.

Margery Grey blushed. It was the first time Dr. Coffee had seen a woman blush in years. Doris Hudson never blushed, she merely made wisecracks to cover up embarrassment. And Mrs. Coffee hadn't blushed since the first years of their marriage—not for ten years at least.

But Margery was very pink as she said, "I can't answer that. I don't know—truly. But I do know that I love Steve—terribly, more than I could ever tell you or him or anybody. I've always loved him, even when he was in love with Harriet, before he went to war, when I was just the dirty-nosed kid sister with her hair in braids. And I've got to help Steve. Where is he?"

"You'll have to ask the police," said Dr. Coffee. "My only function in this matter is to report scientific facts. If your friend Steve— Here's Lieutenant Ritter now."

Max Ritter kicked the door shut behind him with his heel. He pushed his gray felt hat to the back of his head and sat on the edge of a desk. "Hello, Beautiful," he said. "Why don't you make yourself very scarce and invisible? I want to talk to Doc Coffee."

"If it's about Steve Forest I'm not leaving," Margery said.

"Let her stay," said the pathologist.

"Okay." Ritter shrugged. "What's the score now, Doc? Did you find out what hit the lady?"

"Yes," said Dr. Coffee. "It was heparin."

"Could she swallow heparin without tasting it?"

"She didn't swallow it, Max. It must have been injected, because heparin disintegrates in the stomach. As a matter of fact, I found three needle marks in Mrs. Baron's arm. One was obviously the point at which blood was taken for the lab tests this morning. The second was made by the pre-operative opiate. The third must have been the heparin."

"Wouldn't it take savvy to needle in the heparin?" Ritter asked.

Dr. Coffee shook his head. An intravenous injection, he explained, would act more quickly but ten c.c.'s of heparin, even injected into a muscle, would completely destroy the power of the blood to form clots after about half an hour.

Moreover, the surgeon wouldn't notice it during the operation, because he would clamp hemostats on the blood vessels before they even started to bleed. But afterward, when the incision was closed . . .

"Steve didn't do it," said Margery Grey.

"Didn't he?" said Max Ritter. "He was a pharmacist's mate, first class, in the Navy. He'd know about heparin and how to handle a hypodermic. And listen to this, Doc." Ritter took some letters from his pocket.

"I told Dr. Coffee about the letters," said Margery.

"Here's one they didn't get to tear up," the detective continued. "'And if I was in Northbank tonight, instead of out here on the other side of the world, I'd like nothing better than killing you with my own hands. Yes, you and that hairless lapdog you say you love so much.' Looks like Steve wasn't fooling."

"Steve hadn't the chance to do anything to Harriet, even if he'd wanted to," Margery said. "He came to the hospital with me."

"Now, Beautiful, don't try to change your story. You told me he brought flowers and you left your sister's room to get a vase to put the flowers in. So Steve was alone with your sister for at least three minutes."

"He did have the opportunity then," said Dr. Coffee.

"Opportunity," said Ritter, "*and* a hypodermic. Look what I found in the pocket of his pea-jacket." There was a gleam of glass and chromium as the detective produced a syringe from a manila envelope. The syringe was empty, and the needle was snapped off close to the nose. "Anyway of telling what was in this baby?"

"Certainly," said Dr. Coffee. "Doris will make a solution from inside the barrel and we'll titrate for heparin. Hello! This is one of our hypos. See? The name of the hospital is stamped in the ring at the top. Maybe I'd better see if I can find something on the outside too. Doris, give me a camel's hair brush."

Carefully the pathologist ran the tip of the tiny brush around the circular crevices between the metal mountings and the glass cylinder of the syringe. With infinite pains he dusted the grooves onto a thin rectangle of glass the size of two postage stamps. He slipped a thinner and smaller square of glass on top of the first. Then he stepped to his microscope and sat down. For two silent minutes he twisted the focusing knob.

"Max," said Dr. Coffee at last, "what did Steve Forest say when you found the syringe in his pea-jacket?"

"He couldn't explain how it got there. He said he didn't even know it was in his pocket." Ritter sighed. "Doc, it's no fun putting the pinch on a guy I went to school with, particularly when I'll probably

catch hell from my chief for sticking my long eagle beak into something that ain't even officially a crime. Wait till Captain Hall reads the Coroner's report on this. Boy, boy!"

There was another long silence while Dr. Coffee shifted the glass slide under the nose of the microscope. Then he asked, "Max, are there swans in the islands of the Pacific?"

The detective cocked his head to one side and stared at the pathologist as if questioning his sobriety.

Dr. Coffee continued to squint into his microscope.

At nine-thirty the next morning Dr. Dan Coffee paused opposite the blackboard in the main corridor of the surgical wing to read the list of operations chalked up for the day. A dull day was in prospect for the pathology lab—routine tests. Dr. Coffee proceeded to his laboratory around a jog in the corridor. He said good morning to Doris Hudson, took off his jacket and had one arm into his white coat before he saw Lieutenant Max Ritter sitting on his desk, smoking a cigarette.

"Hi, Doc," Ritter said. "You're late."

"I stopped off at Northbank College on my way down," said Dr. Coffee. "I wanted to talk to the professor of ornithology—about swans."

"Swans!" the detective echoed. "Say, what the hell is all this bird talk, Doc?"

"Maybe nothing," said Dr. Coffee. "Anything new, Max?"

"Plenty," Ritter replied. "Last night while I was working on Steve Forest a couple of my boys were keeping tabs on the Widower Baron. They waited outside the Midtown Mortuary Chapel while he was fixing up a nice funeral for his wife. They followed him to a Southside bar where he met the lush and lovely Diana Price. Mr. Baron and Miss Price drowned their sorrow in two-three drinks and then departed, with my boys right behind. The bereaved husband drove the sorrowing Miss Price to her home on the Heights. My boys report that two minutes later a light went on in Miss Price's bedroom."

"Was Baron with her?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"With her? He was way ahead of her," Max Ritter said. "I'm sorry I can't give you a complete blow-by-blow report, but my boys say that after one minute and twenty seconds of the first round, Miss Price broke the clinch, went to her own corner, and pulled down the shade."

"Very interesting," said Dr. Coffee. "Particularly for Steve Forest."

"I don't say this gives Steve an out," Ritter said, "but a grief-stricken widower who makes like a tomcat on the night his beloved wife conks out sure as hell better think up some good answers. Look, Doc, I asked the boys to bring Jerry Baron up here. Also the Price dame,

Margery Grey and Steve Forest—but separate. I hate moving in on you like this, Doc but—"

"I guess I invited you to this one," Dan Coffee said.

"If that tightwad City Council would come through with a few nickels for a police lab I wouldn't have to bother you," the detective continued. "There's nothing like a little high-class science to scare hell out of a wrong guy. He thinks he's pulled off the smartest job in the books but when he finds that a smarter guy can put a little blood in a bottle, add a drop of this and that, with maybe a dash of Worcester sauce, and come up with all the answers—well, it knocks 'em."

"Let's get Dr. Andrews in on this, too," said the pathologist. "After all, it was his patient."

"Sure, get Doc Andrews if he'll help bust this open in a hurry," Ritter said. "Because . . . Well, to tell the truth, Doc, I ain't on this case officially any more. In fact, I was yanked off it this morning with pinwheels and Roman candles. Captain Hall says, 'The case is closed. It shouldn't never of been opened. The Coroner says the Baron dame died from surgical shock.'

"So I says, 'But Doc Coffee claims it's a plain case of homicide.' Then the Captain blows his top. 'Listen,' he says. 'Are you taking orders from me or from that quack up at Pasteur Hospital? Now lay off.' They're all afraid of hurting the Coroner's feelings, specially in an election year."

"I didn't know Captain Hall was even interested in politics," Dr. Coffee said.

"He ain't," said Ritter. "But he's got a wife and four kids and he wants to keep on being friends with the Chief of Police. The Chief ain't only his boss—he's a political buddy of the Coroner's."

Dr. Coffee frowned. "But if you're off this case, Max—"

"Look, Doc, today's my day off." Max Ritter grinned. "And if I want to work at my hobby of cracking homicide cases on my own time nobody can say anything as long as I use your lab for headquarters and as long as I can prove the Coroner is wrong." The grin vanished. "Say, Doc, you ain't going to let me down? You'll make an honest woman of me?"

"I'm sure we're right, Max," Dr. Coffee said.

The little laboratory was crowded. Doris Hudson was as busy as a bird dog in an aviary, shooing plain-clothesmen off the centrifuge, the microtome and the electric oven in which she was melting paraffin. She had already moved the more fragile glassware and perishable specimens to bacteriology next door.

Dr. Coffee was re-appraising the four people he had met in the waiting room the evening before. He was contrasting the bland smiling freshly-shaven Jerry Baron with the tousled and bewhiskered Steve Forest, who had slept in his clothes at the police station and looked it.

Margery Grey seemed not to have slept at all. Diana Price looked impeccable and imperturbable. Dr. Coffee glanced at her *suède* handbag, and then at the smaller bag of woolen broadcloth in Margery's lap. He wondered if Max was going to crack this alone or if science would have to step in.

Max Ritter spoke briefly and somewhat ungrammatically about the miracles of science in crime detection. He asked Dr. Coffee to explain how he had discovered that Harriet Baron had bled to death as the result of an injection of heparin.

"So you see, folks," Ritter said when the pathologist had concluded, "it ain't possible to hide anything from the doctor. Does anybody want to come clean now or do we have to sweat it out?"

There was no response.

"Okay, so we get to work," said Ritter. "When your father died last year, Beautiful—I mean, Miss Grey—you and your sister Harriet came into quite a piece of change, didn't you?"

"Father left us a considerable estate, yes," Margery said.

"Who gets Harriet's share now? Jerry Baron?"

"Unless my sister changed her will in the last month or so," Margery replied, looking at the floor, "the estate was to go into a trust fund. Jerry was to get the income from it as long as he didn't remarry."

Dr. Coffee was watching Diana Price. He saw her pause in the act of lighting a cigarette. She stared hard at Jerry Baron across the flame of her lighter.

Dr. Coffee leaned forward suddenly to whisper to Doris Hudson, "Doris, go ask the head nurse to come in here."

"Miss Grey," Max Ritter went on, "did your sister know that Jerry Baron was two-timing her with Diana Price?"

"She knew . . . Well, everybody knew that Jerry and Diana were quite close before he married Harriet," Margery said. "She—"

"Now, see here," Baron interrupted. "This is all a lot of nonsense. Diana and I are very old friends."

"Not so old you don't have young ideas," Ritter said. "What were you two up to last night?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Baron blandly.

"Oh, come, Jerry," said Diana Price. "Let's not go through the motions of protecting my reputation. I told you we were being followed last night."

"Ain't it true, Baron," Ritter pursued, "that you wanted to get rid of your wife so you could marry Miss Price?"

"Of course it's not true."

"Didn't you ask your wife for a divorce? And didn't she refuse to give it to you?"

"I never asked Harriet for a divorce," Baron said. "I didn't want a divorce. I loved Harriet."

"But now that you're a free man

I guess you figure on marrying Diana Price, don't you, Baron?"

"Why, no," said Baron. He smiled blankly. "I have no intention of remarrying."

Dr. Coffee was watching Diana Price again. He saw a faint ripple run along her pointed jaw. Her eyes changed expression.

"One more question, Baron," said Ritter. "Were you alone with your wife yesterday, shortly before the operation?"

"No," said Baron.

"Why, Jerry darling, you forget," said Diana. Her voice, too, had changed. It was metallic now, higher pitched, almost shrill. "You were alone with Harriet when I arrived. Remember?"

"That's right, I guess I was," Baron admitted. "I was with Harriet when Dr. Andrews gave her a hypo. When he left, I stayed alone with Harriet until Diana came. By that time Harriet was getting pretty dopey, so Diana and I went to the waiting room."

"Right to the waiting room? Both of you?"

"Yes," said Diana.

"Well, yes," said Baron. "Diana went to the powder room on the way, but she joined me a couple of minutes later."

"So you had plenty of time, Baron, to give your wife a shot of heparin before Diana arrived," Ritter said. "And while she was in the powder room you slipped the hypo in the pocket of Steve Forest's pea-jacket in the waiting room."

"I did nothing of the kind," Baron protested.

"Okay, Clam," said Ritter. "I guess Doc Coffee has ways of getting the truth out of you. What about it, Doc?"

"I think it would help clear up matters," said Dr. Coffee, "if Miss Price would submit to an A-Z test."

Diana Price stiffened in her chair. "I? An A-Z test? Why?" she demanded haughtily.

"To confirm—or disprove—what the naked eye seems to tell me about you," said Dr. Coffee. "From certain external symptoms which are not completely reliable, I should say you were about two months pregnant, Miss Price. Shall we make a test?"

"Decidedly not." Diana spoke through lips that were tight against her teeth. "Not only is your proposal insulting but I can't see that it has any bearing on poor Harriet's death."

"I can," said Dr. Coffee. "If the father of your unborn child was in no hurry to divorce his wife to marry you, you may have taken other steps to secure his freedom. Oh hello, Miss Toms."

Doris Hudson had just returned to the laboratory with the head nurse. Dr. Coffee addressed the buxom woman in white: "Miss Toms, you know Miss Price, don't you?"

The head nurse nodded pleasantly. "Indeed I do. Miss Price was one of our most faithful Nurses' Aids dur-

ing the war. She hasn't been quite so faithful recently although she did come around again last week."

"Last week? In uniform? On a regular tour of duty?"

"She put in a full afternoon. Miss Price has always shown a great interest in her work," said the head nurse. "Are we going to see you more often now, Miss Price?"

Diana's only reply was a slight contraction of her nostrils.

"Did Miss Price ever assist at a blood transfusion," Dr. Coffee asked, "one at which heparin was used?"

"Let me see. . . . Yes, I believe she did."

"So she would have access to the hospital's heparin and hypodermic syringes," Dr. Coffee said. "Dr. Andrews, do you remember when Mrs. Baron made up her mind to be operated?"

"I'd been urging the operation for the past month, after she'd had a slight flare-up of a chronic condition," Dr. Andrews said. "But she made her decision only ten days ago. She came to my office with Miss Price and told me she'd talked things over with her husband and decided to have the appendix out."

"Ten days ago. And three days later, Miss Price came to the hospital in her old rôle of Nurses' Aid to filch a syringe full of heparin." Dr. Coffee turned abruptly to Diana. "Miss Price, you didn't go to the powder room when you left Mr. Baron for a moment yesterday afternoon. You returned to Mrs. Baron's room, because you knew she was alone and so drowsy from drugs that she would not realize that you were injecting heparin into her arm."

"Oh, stop it, Doctor." Diana was desperately jocular, but her smile stuck to her teeth. "Lieutenant Ritter just said it was Jerry who put the hypodermic in poor Steve's pocket."

"Max was mistaken," said Dr. Coffee gravely. "I have evidence to show that the hypodermic was carried in a woman's handbag before it went into Steve Forest's pocket. Max, would you please confiscate Miss Grey's handbag—and Miss Price's? I want the compacts —and the powder puffs."

Max Ritter pounced on the two handbags, and Dr. Coffee held his breath. If the powder puffs were alike, he was sunk.

Margery Grey's compact was small and square. The powder puff was a tiny pad of plush. Diana Price's big round tortoise-shell compact contained a large feathery puff. Dr. Coffee breathed again.

He said, "Last night I made a microscopic examination of the dustings from under the metal parts of the syringe found in Steve's pocket. I found particles of rice powder and feather fragments. The feather fragments have been positively identified as swansdown. The best powder puffs, like Miss Price's, are made of swansdown."

"Max, I guess you can consider that fragment of swansdown as a

feather in your cap. You can count on my testimony later but right now I've got all of yesterday's operations to diagnose. So if you could move your three-ring circus out of my lab . . ."

For several seconds no one spoke. The only sound in the laboratory was a long sigh as Margery Grey buried her face in the rumpled bosom of Steve Forest's jumper. Then Max Ritter put his hand on Diana's shoulder.

"Diana baby," he said, "let's us go down to the detective bureau and watch Captain Hall's face when we tell him how you and the Coroner both slipped up on a few drops of blood."

A moment later Dr. Andrews said, "Dan, I can't begin to thank you. I'm sorry it turned out to be such nasty business. You know, for a minute I was almost sorry for Diana Price—when she first realized she'd planned the nearly-perfect crime for nothing, that her poor dumb playboy wasn't going to marry her anyhow, and she tried to pin it all on the handsome brute."

"I might have been sorry," said Dr. Coffee, "if she hadn't tried to involve the sailor."

The phone rang and Doris Hudson answered.

"There's one thing I'd like to ask," said Dr. Andrews. "About those visual symptoms of second-month pregnancy—just what are they, Dan?"

Dr. Coffee laughed. "Unless you take the lady's clothes off," he said, "there aren't any, except occasionally a slight thickening of the lips, the nostrils, and the skin around the eyes. But you know as well as I do that's nothing to go on. I just made up that part to get Diana's reaction. Who was it, Doris?"

"Your wife," Doris Hudson said. home for dinner. She has a duck."

"Great stars! It's nearly noon and look at that stack of slides. I'll be here till Christmas."

"Roast duck, stuffed with wild rice, and basted with brandy and bitter-orange peel. Your favorite duck, Mrs. Coffee says. I told her you'd be home for dinner," said Doris. She sat down beside the microscope and opened her notebook.

"She wanted to know if you'd be

It takes an adroit and daring author to make a barber the chief figure in a mystery story. With plenty of straightedged razors and throats to cut, he is almost as obvious a suspect as the Edwardian butler of unsainted memory. Dorothy L. Sayers, however, has never lacked either adroitness or daring. In THE INSPIRATION OF MR. BUDD, *slated for our next edition, she puts the spotlight on a gentleman of the shears and lather. But Mr. Budd is a barber with rare talents that give him a right to the center of the stage, as well as to certain more material types of reward.*

we've got time

by . . . Edward Ronns

Nobody else saw a tie-up between the jewel robbery and the murdered girl. But Brady was Irish and knew a tie-up must be there.

BRADY WAS KICKING AT THE sand in an apparent excess of animal spirits. With each kick he turned sidewise, so he could glance backward without being too obvious about it. At the top of a grass-grown sand dune he paused and said, "Delia, I think we're being followed."

It returned to her then, that suffocating sense of terror and bewilderment. It was still with her. It hadn't gone away these past two days. It was like a heavily overcast sky that would never clear again—or a weight dragging endlessly at her feet.

So she hadn't lost those two men—they hadn't left her. It was bad enough with the police after her but with those two hanging like birds of ill-omen everywhere she turned—grinning, winking, smirking, muttering a warning as she passed or a knowing look—it was too much. She couldn't go on.

Casually she said, "Are you sure?"

Brady nodded and looked at his cigarette. They were standing still on the crest of the dune. The sun was a blinding glare to the west. "Pretty sure. Turn around and look but take it easy."

Eddie Ronns is one of the most experienced mystery craftsmen currently operating on the American scene. Triumphant survivor of more than a decade of that editorial equivalent of the theatrical stock company, the pulp magazines, Ronns has risen to the far higher literary and economic level of the so-called slicks and is currently establishing himself as a mainstay in pocket-sized mystery originals. This story is one of his best.

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She had felt herself secure here. Perhaps it was Brady's presence that had given her that false sense of release. Seabury stood alone on an island four miles from the Jersey mainland, cut off from the world by flat tidewater marsh zigzagged by crooked secretly-running salt-water creeks. Sunlight glittered hotly on the placid bay. A seagull screamed low overhead. Wind rustled through the tough clumps of grass that grew miraculously out of the fine white sand.

Turning she saw the two figures plodding behind them. There was the tall thin one, the one with the paper-white face and small viciously knowing eyes—and the shorter plump one, whose cheerful smile was worse, if possible, than the other's bitter scowl. She shivered.

Brady was watching her with thinly veiled curiosity. "Know 'em?"

"I—yes."

They were coming straight toward them over the grassy dunes, walking from the direction of little Seabury at the other end of the island. There seemed to be something purposeful and relentless about their approach. Like two juggernauts, Delia thought.

Brady said, "You don't seem glad to see them."

"I'm not."

"Then let's—"

"No, they've seen us." She turned and closed cold convulsive fingers on Brady's tanned forearm. He was wearing a striped singlet, slacks and tennis shoes. His red hair was afire with afternoon sunlight. "Please, I want to talk to them—alone."

"Delia," he said, "you're frightened."

"I'm not."

"Don't kid me. You were scared sick yesterday when we met. I've been trying to coax you out of it ever since. I thought I was doing all right but these two mugs coming up have rattled you again. If you want me to I'll . . ."

Her lips were white and she was trembling. "I want you to go away, Brady. Please, for your own sake."

They had argued too long. The short one was already puffing up the slope of the dune. His face was red and peeling from sunburn. His tall companion still had that dead-white look about him. The short one was wearing a double-breasted green gabardine suit and cocoa-colored summer shoes and a heavy orange signet ring on one pudgy finger. The tall man was dressed in somber blue serge and looked shabby.

The pudgy one jerked a bent thumb toward the Atlantic and spoke without looking at Brady. "Scram, you."

Brady didn't move. His green eyes were queerly bright. Delia drew closer to him, shivering, her soft eyes enormous in her white face. She made swallowing sounds but she didn't say anything.

The pudgy man said in a flattish voice, "Can't you hear?"

"I can hear," Brady said.

"Then scram." His voice was flat.

"No."

"We want to talk to the girl."

"I'll wait."

"Then wait someplace else."

"No," Brady said again.

The pudgy man rubbed a hand over his face and stared. The tall one stood by in somber silence, looking at the girl without expression.

Delia said faintly, "You'd better go. You don't know these men, they'll . . ."

"I know them." Brady's voice was harsh. "They're a couple of cheap tinhorn hoods."

"Miser," said the pudgy man.

The tall one stepped forward without emotion, brushing the girl aside, and swung at Brady's head. Brady ducked. His knuckles spatted on the tall man's lantern jaw and the other staggered backward and abruptly sat down on the sand.

"Lay off," Brady said. His eyes glittered grass-green.

The tall man dragged out a heavy sap. Blood wriggled like a bright red worm from a corner of his crooked mouth. His eyes were lidded. Brady stepped forward and there was a swift brief flurry. Sand hissed underfoot and grass rattled. Then the tall man sank down limply. Brady was holding the blackjack by the loose wrist-thong. He turned toward the pudgy man.

The other gasped, "Geez!" and went for a gun. Brady waited until it was in sight before he threw the sap. It went straight as an arrow, thudding against the man's hand and knocking the gun from his fingers in a glittering arc.

Brady picked it up. "Beat it," he snapped.

They backed up, facing him, and retreated down the sand dune. At the bottom they turned and began to run. They were still running when they disappeared from sight. Brady stood still with his feet spread a little in the sand, the gun dangling from his long fingers.

There was something awesome about him, Delia thought—awful and wonderful. Quite suddenly she knew that she wasn't afraid any more, that she had built those two men up in her imagination to terrifying proportions. In three brief minutes this redheaded young man had made them look ridiculous. You can't be afraid of what you ridicule.

Then, like a thunderbolt, she saw the badge—a shiny metal badge, glittering in the sand where it had fallen from Brady's pocket. She picked it up as he came toward her and her fingers shook. Out of the frying pan into the fire . . .

The badge read, *Allied Jewelers Protection Service,* and had the numeral 9 on the center insignia. She handed it back to Brady and was surprised at the steadiness of her voice. "So you're a cop."

Brady nodded and stuck another cigarette in his mouth and lit it. "Yes."

She said, "I guess you know all

about me then. I'm Delia Hillard. I . . ." She took a deep breath and felt weights slipping off her shoulders. "I'm wanted for the murder of Lulu Bannister."

The Lulu Bannister case had made front-page headlines only once, the night the girl's body was found. After that it had been relegated to the middle sections of the newspapers. It wasn't important. Two unemployed girls, rooming together, had quarreled when one, Lulu, seemed to have fallen into luck and some money.

Lulu was found with a knife in her breast and the other girl, Delia Hillard, was missing. So was the money the landlady had heard them quarreling about. The Delia girl was suspected of having had a male accomplice who actually drove the knife home.

Brady had got into it quite by accident. He was working on something entirely different then, querying the clerks in Michele's about two missing ruby pendants—the Othman rubies. Paul Michele, owner and manager of the jewelry shop, had notions about a so-called mystery woman and Brady was busy trying to get to the bottom of it.

When he dropped in on Finnegan and the Lieutenant chanced to comment on the Bannister girl's death having occurred the same evening Brady said, "They're tied together. It's two cases in one. Lulu Bannister is Michele's mystery woman —the babe who posed as a socialite to get into the shop and stay late. She lifted the rubies."

"You're nuts," Finnegan said. "We turned the apartment upside down. There were no stones in the flat. We're looking now for a kid named Delia Hillard. Seems as if she and a boy friend did the job. There's no connection between the two cases."

"There is. Lulu's the one who stole Michele's stones. That's why she was killed."

"And where are the jewels now?"

"This Delia girl—" Brady began.

Finnegan had snorted. "Yeah—the Delia girl. And where is *she?*"

"I'll find her," Brady said.

He looked at her. Her face was white and her lips were trembling but there was relief in her eyes now that she knew who he was. She'd led him a merry twenty-four hour chase. He had stumbled on her trail quite by accident when he spotted Matt Deems' two hoods, Miser Bannon and Dooly, the pudgy one, getting on the train at Penn Station.

Just luck—and a hunch—made Brady get on with them. In five minutes he'd spotted their quarry—and his. Delia Hillard. They'd all got off at Sea Crest, on the mainland, and taken the chugging little ferry here to Seabury.

Delia was looking at him now with slowly widening eyes. "You knew it all along," she whispered. "You knew who I was."

"Yes."

"And you didn't . . ."

Brady said gently, "I don't think you killed Lulu Bannister."

"Oh, I didn't."

"Sure not. Sit down," he said.

They sat down on the sand, facing the ocean. The wind played in the girl's dark hair and ruffled her light dress. She had nice legs. She was nice all around. Brady gave her a cigarette and lit one for himself. He said, "But you know why she was killed."

"No, I don't."

"Then why did you run away?"

She made a helpless gesture. "I didn't—I was kidnapped."

Brady wasn't surprised. "By those two?" He jerked his head in the direction the two hoods had taken.

"Yes." The girl shivered and hugged her knees. "I came home at seven-thirty and found Lu—she was dead by then. I'd been out looking for a job—I sing, you see—and I didn't expect anything unusual, not even when I found the door open. But when I saw her . . ."

"Take it easy," Brady said, watching her mouth tremble. "We've got time."

"So I went out to call the police. That's when I was kidnapped by those two men. They were in a car. They—they didn't mistreat me. They kept me a prisoner for a whole day and kept asking me about some jewels. I still don't know what they meant by it."

Brady's green eyes were bright. "And then?"

"I got away while they were waiting for Matt Deems, their boss. You know, the gambler. I couldn't understand it. You see, Lulu had been going around with Deems and I knew he was a racketeer. That's why Lu and I quarreled."

"Tell me about that," said Brady.

"It was just that I thought Lu was playing with fire, if you know what I mean. That morning she said she was going to make a lot of money and I said things to her and we quarreled. That's what the landlady heard. I wanted Lu to give the clothes back."

"What clothes?"

"Deems had given her a complete outfit—a navy-blue costume in a four-button length. He even gave her a hat, white doeskin gloves and shoes to go with it. Is something the matter?" she asked suddenly.

"Everything's fine," Brady said. Delia had just described the outfit worn by Paul Michele's mystery woman.

"I told you about it because I remember when I found her the costume was missing. Does that help?"

"A lot," Brady said.

Delia went on, "Even after I escaped from Deems' men I couldn't go to the police. I was frightened. Reading my name in the paper and realizing how the case sounded against me—my quarrel with Lu and the talk about the money—it seemed too late to go to the police by then. I thought I could run away."

"And Deems' men were content just to follow you?"

"You too," she said diffidently.

Brady stood up, helped her to her feet and they began walking back to Seabury.

"Do you trust me, Delia?"

She didn't hesitate. "Yes."

Brady looked at his watch. "I'm going back to town. I'll return by midnight at the latest. You'll be cleared by then."

"But how?"

"The Bradys get hunches." He smiled. "I want you to go to your room now and lock yourself in and wait for me. Don't open up for anybody but me. Got that?"

"Yes," she said.

It was hot and stifling in the city after the day at Seabury. Brady had dinner at the terminal and then took a cab downtown to an address in the Village. He had been to the apartment just once before, shortly after his talk with Lieutenant Finnegan.

A cop was still stationed on the landing as he slowly climbed the steps. The cop's face glistened with sweat and he was standing near the back window, trying to get a little air. The hall was suffocating. The cop turned toward him with a tired grin.

"Hello, Red. Come back for another try?"

"Just a look," Brady said.

"Nobody's been around here at all. This place is like a Turkish bath. That Delia dame hasn't showed up yet either."

Brady borrowed the cop's key and let himself inside, snapped on the light. The place was exactly as the homicid squad had left it. There were just two rooms, a bath and a kitchenette, overlooking a dingy court. A eucalyptus tree brushed dusty dispirited leaves against the window.

He walked into the bedroom and went to work on the closets. There were a rack of dresses and three coats and some feminine hats on the shelf. None of the outfits corresponded to Delia Hillard's description of Lulu's navy-blue costume—the one Paul Michele had described as belonging to the woman who'd posed as a socialite customer in order to steal the Othman rubies.

He hadn't expected to find the costume here after Delia told him she'd noticed it was missing—although he wondered why he should have taken her word so implicitly. He hoped fervently that the Brady hunch about this girl would pan out. If he was wrong and she took the opportunity to flee again he'd have the whole police department down on his neck.

He went down on his hands and knees and pulled out all the shoes from the closet and arranged them on the floor, examining each pair carefully. He separated Delia's smaller ones from the dead girl's. There were no new pairs.

"Even the shoes," he muttered.

He left the apartment, returning the key to the cop, and went back to the street. From the corner drugstore he telephoned to the

Allied Jewelers Protection offices and after a while got Randall, the chief, on the wire. He gave his name and winced as Randall cursed him.

"Where in triple hell have you been for the last two days?"

"Working on the Paul Michele job, trying to save the Old Man a cool eighty grand in insurance. Any objections to that?"

Randall snapped, "You still think the Bannister killing is tied in with it?"

"I know it is," Brady said.

Randall's voice crackled tinnily in the receiver. "You don't know a damn thing. You're just chiseling your vacation a week ahead of time. Get off the case and come in. I've got something else for you."

"But I've got a lead," Brady said quietly.

"To hell with your leads! Come in!"

Brady hung up and stepped from the hot telephone booth. He stood with his hands in his pockets and frowned. Shoes—why had Lulu Bannister's shoes been taken? The rest of her outfit might conceivably have been removed by the murderer to prevent Michele's identification—and now that he thought of it Finnegan had had the man down to look at the murdered girl.

But the identification hadn't panned out—which was one of the reasons for Randall's irascibility and Finnegan's skepticism. But the shoes? High-heeled pumps, if the lifts were hollowed, could easily have been the hiding place for the Othman rubies.

Brady lit a cigarette and left.

Lieutenant Finnegan's office was hot and dusty, lighted by a single gooseneck lamp that stood on the desk beside a snoring fan. Finnegan looked up with a scowl as Brady's tall figure came through the doorway.

"You again?"

Brady did not smile. He took off his hat, hung it on the telephone, and sat down, said, "How would you like to close a couple of cases?"

The lieutenant's grin was sardonic. "I'll bite. What cases?"

"The Lulu Bannister stabbing and the theft of the Othman rubies."

Finnegan stared. "You mean they *are* tied in?"

"Yes."

"Tell me how," said Finnegan. Then he sat bolt upright and snapped accusingly, "You found that Delia girl!"

"That's right."

"Where is she?"

"Take it easy," Brady said. "She's in the clear."

"*You* say so! I think different. I . . ."

Brady's eyes rested on the Lieutenant's straw hat hung on a peg. "Just listen," he said. He picked up the telephone book and riffled through the pages and found the office number of the Midnight Club. "Get me Matt Deems." Waiting, he took a handkerchief and covered his mouth, then said, "Matt? This Matt Deems?"

Deem's voice was low and thick with annoyance.

Brady's tones were curiously changed. "This is John Doe. I seen you throw away the dame's clothes, big-shot. You know what I mean. Pay up or else. I'll be waiting outside Frank & Al's—you know where that is. I'll be wearin' a straw hat. I figure I oughta tell the cops but you're my pal, Matt."

Matt Deems snarled, "Nuts, copper—I don't know what you're talking about!"

The receiver crashed down.

Finnegan was wearing a broad grin. Brady didn't look at him. He used the phone book again and looked up Paul Michele's number. Michele lived in an expensive apartment house overlooking Central Park. A butler answered the phone. After a delay Paul Michele's throaty accent said, "Yes?"

Brady repeated the little speech. He wasn't interrupted. There was a moment's pause and then Michele said, "I hardly know what to say. You should inform the police. I most certainly will not meet you!"

"You got an hour," Brady repeated. He hung up.

Finnegan said, "Well?"

Brady picked up the straw hat, skimmed it into the Lieutenant's lap, said, "You can dodge bullets better than I. Let's go."

The place was a dimly lighted corner on the West Side, hot and black and noisy. The taproom gave out a persistent thumping melody from the nickel recording machine. A few people sat around on steps, fanned themselves with handkerchiefs and newspapers or just sat limply, suffering.

Brady sat in his coupé with the motor idling, aware of tension on his nerves. Lounging on the corner under a street light, conspicuous in the straw hat, was Lieutenant Finnegan's big figure.

A car droned by and disappeared around the corner. One headlight was a little dimmer than the other. In three minutes the same car returned. Brady was ready for it when it happened. So was Finnegan.

The big cop jumped as the snout of a gun poked through the open driver's window. There was a quick burst of shots, six of them, and bullets spattered the brick wall. Somebody screamed in shrill alarm. Finnegan was flat on the pavement, his gun out, crashing hard against his hand.

Brady kicked the gas pedal. His car jumped like a thing alive. The oncoming sedan swerved wildly, careened toward the opposite side of the street. Brady twisted the wheel hard. There was a rending crash of torn metal and both cars hit the curb.

Brady's feet hit the sidewalk before the coupé had stopped rocking. He had a gun in his hand. He ran around the front of the sedan and yanked open the door. A white-clad figure slumped over the wheel. A gun dangled from the man's limp fingers. Brady swiped it aside and stepped back.

"Relax, Michele," he said. "You're going to the cooler."

Finnegan was running ponderously up the street. He looked sore. He stopped and stared at Paul Michele's figure and said incredulously, "*Him?*"

Brady nodded. "You'll have to pick up Matt Deems too. Charge him with lifting the Othman rubies and kidnapping Delia Hillard. He'll get a good jolt. But this guy Michele killed Lulu Bannister. He trailed her after she lifted the stones to her apartment, probably by the taxi driver. He wanted the rubies back. He got the bright idea that he could collect insurance and have the stones too. He stabbed her and took her outfit with him so he wouldn't have to identify it if the cases were ever linked up."

He took a breath. "Deems had engineered the theft though. He dressed Lulu up as a lady and gave her shoes with hollow heels in which to hide the rubies once she got into the taxi. Michele took the shoes when he killed her. He came here tonight to rub out what he thought was a witness to part of his crime. What it amounts to is that he hijacked Matt Deems and Deems snatched the Delia girl in an effort to find out what had happened."

Finnegan said, "But how did you tumble to it?"

"I found Delia Hillard and she happened to mention Lulu's new outfit having been missing after the murder. So I got a hunch and played it."

"Hunch, hell," said Finnegan. "Where is the Delia dame?"

"I'll let you know," Brady said.

Seabury was cool and serene, lulled by the monotone of the Atlantic, as Brady stepped off the little ferry and trudged up the grass-grown walk toward Main Street.

Delia Hillard was asleep in a chair on the veranda of the hotel. He noticed that the little ferry wharf was visible from where she sat.

She was breathing lightly and easily, and there was a little smile at the curling corners of her soft mouth. The lines of strain were gone from around her eyes.

Brady sat down in a chair beside her and stuck a cigarette in his mouth and lit it. He didn't wake her.

There was plenty of time.

Classical music has long been renowned for its three B's (Bach, Beethoven and Brahms) but with our next issue THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE will be winning fame with its three C's—in this instance Charteris, Chesterton and Conan Doyle. Look for the stories by this triumphant trio as well as titles equally engrossing by authors whose names do not happen to begin with the, in this instance, enchanted initial.

A few years ago Richard Altick wrote a fascinating book called THE SCHOLAR ADVENTURERS, in which he described in vivid detail the always difficult, oftentimes dramatic and occasionally dangerous work of the literary researcher, whose job it is to unearth the truth about Wordsworth's love life, trail Byron through a war-torn Greece or discover just what did happen to Christopher Marlowe.

Until we began to assemble material for THE SAINT we enjoyed Mr. Altick's book vicariously. Such musty digging in library stacks, attics and bookstore basements we considered strictly a chore for rapt Ph.D.'s.

Now we know at first hand just what Mr. Altick was talking about.

Naturally we are not discussing the new stories in THE SAINT. While fresh-written tales of sufficient impact and artistry are not easy to obtain, basically they must come to us. However, it is also our purpose to make each issue of THE SAINT a first-class anthology of mystery stories already published, yet not republished elsewhere. These are the stories we have to go out and dig up.

Every mystery-tale addict can recall a few outstanding tales at the drop of a poisoned pin—tales whose ingenuity or sheer power have been printed indelibly in his memory. But when it comes to recalling enough such stories to fill not one issue or two but scores, perhaps hundreds of issues to come, no one memory can do the job.

To date our anthological researches have taken us to England, France and Italy, in person as well as in the less corpuscular form of cables and letters. We have plowed literally through hundreds of collections of "best" short stories and age-fragile bound volumes of defunct magazines. And for our labors remain faced with thousands more similiar source-spots yet to be explored. For which, of course, praise Allah!

But there are compensations. When you turn up something as delightfully unexpected as a T. S. Stribling's POGGIOLI AND THE REFUGEES in this issue, or a Ben Hecht's MIRACLE OF THE 15 MURDERERS in our last and a Judge Priest complete novel by Irvin S. Cobb in our next issue, you become wonderfully aware that the game is well worth the candle, even if said candle is burned at one end and the middle.

Still and all the world has become a remarkable place when an editor must be a detective to put out a detective fiction magazine.

—The Publisher.

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